

# By northern shores

## In the Barrens

Shortly after the Autumn Equinox, the Navarr army of Isaella's Dance enters the Barrens from Semmerholm. They pause briefly beneath the Eaves of Peytaht where they are received as guests of the Great Forest Orcs. There is some concern from the other orc septs in the Barrens, especially among the Rahvin. There is more than enough reason for the inhabitants of this vast territory to be concerned by the movement of Imperial troops, given that many of them have experienced the heavy hand of the Empire in recent seasons. Chief Vallack of the Great Forest sept offers reassurance. The Navarr are their allies – practically family – and there is no need to fear them. When Isaella's Dance marches east from the Great Forest, the Spears of the Pines march with them – nearly a thousand orc hunters and warriors bound by loyalty and respect to aid their friends in the fight against their mutual enemy, the Druj.

At the same time as the Navarr army is moving south into East Ring, to join the desperate defence of Therunin, another army moves north into the Bleaks. The coming of the Gryphon's Pride, however, is something the orcs of the Barrens might do well to fear.

*Too long have we watched as others decide the fate of our homelands; they give land to those who stood against us and spit in the face of the way. They give aid to those who hate us whilst Imperial citizens suffer with wars engaged in all our lands with the coffers running dry. The Throne speaks of*

*virtue and vigilance, yet no others are prepared to act. We will not stand by idle while these atrocities continue. We will not fear to act! I stood before priests and swore my dedication to vigilance, and on that very same night I had a Profound Dream. In the Barrens I saw a great beast wreathed in shadow, its eyes were the darkest sickening green and its breath writhed with plague and poison. As I steeled my resolved and stepped towards the fouled shadow it receded into the Fangs. Berechiah's life taught us that though some may frown on our actions, the truly virtuous do not fear to do what must be done. We will be decisive and do what we know to be right, and remove the taint from the Barrens. We will liberate the Fangs for the good of the Empire and Dawn so we may prosper and survive the onslaught coming at us from all sides. For only we are prepared to give our all for the Empire. We will set on the Rahvin of the Fangs in the dead of night, and tear them from the mine. Those who stand against our steady conquest will meet with steel and death. Glory to Dawn and to the Empire!*

*Archavion Wolfborne, General of the Gryphon's Pride*

## **Questions of Consequence**

After each summit, the Civil Service publicise the orders submitted by the generals of the Imperial Military Council. The Autumn Equinox is no exception. When the orders are made public, however, one proves highly controversial.

The Gryphon's Pride are instructed to leave the struggle against the Druj in Therunin, to march north into the Barrens, and to

attack the orcs of the Rahvin Sept on the Bitter Shore.

They are to claim the mithril mine, which has been in orc hands since the region was liberated. Former slaves, the remnants of the old Rahvin sept that once resisted both Empire and Druj, they refused to leave the mine where so many of them had worked and died as slaves to the tyrants of the Mallum. Last year, the Imperial Senate chose to recognise them as foreigners, in pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the situation. The magistrates confirm that order of the Dawnish general is illegal; as foreigners, the Rahvin are extended the same legal protections as any Imperial citizen.

Yet they are powerless to prevent the action. The Military Council is built on the premise that each general has complete discretion as to the orders they issue, even if those orders break Imperial law. The soldiers of the Gryphon's Pride will fight to follow those orders as best they can, secure in the belief that the general's orders represent the will of their nation.

That the order is illegal, there is no doubt. That the general has committed a serious crime, there is no question. That the Gryphon's Pride will obey that order, however, is likewise certain.

## **On Mighty Wings**

For Imperial soldiers, the Bleaks are an untracked wilderness. The marshes of Therunin spread north across the border into the dense trees here. There are tracks, but no roads. Heavy beards of ivy and bramble hang from the trees, and there is a sense that the woods themselves resent intruders – whether they be human or orc.

Several septs of orcs call the Bleaks their home – the largest among them are the Karass, many of whom have drifted west

from the Plains of Teeth to seek sanctuary deep in the wild places here. Unlike the Empire, the Karass are familiar with this place, wise to its hidden pathways. Dawnish troops see no signs of the orcs that call the eastern Barrens their home, nor do they have any reason to seek them out. The knights and yeofolk of the Gryphon's Pride cut a straight line across the region, north-east through the dense forest, trusting to their numbers and their shining armour to protect them from any threat of beast or outlaw. Their trust is not misplaced; they see neither hide nor frond of hydra or marshwalker as they travel north.

From the Bleaks, the army bypasses the trackless depths of the Untrod Groves. Perhaps just as well – a vibrant ward of Spring magic has been woven over the forest there by Imperial magicians. The trees are roused to partial wakefulness, and it is best that the Gryphon's Pride do not test their awareness. Would the forest wards protect the soldiers of Dawn, or would they mark them as a threat and seek to hamper them? It is difficult to say one way or another, but the spell is known to draw on the power of the Prince with a Thousand Foes and he is said to have little love for the armoured knights of Dawn.

In the event they skirt the bounds, marching north through the Plains of Teeth. They do not cross the plains, avoiding the great towers of Houndsgate where once the tyrants of the Mallum leered west toward Dawnguard. They remain fixed on their target, and messengers sent from the garrison to question their presence are met with a wall of stony silence.

On the edge of the Saltmarsh, where the Vendarri once dwelt, they turn again, to the north-west, onto the Bitter Strand. As they see the salt lake, that little Barren Sea, they have reached their target.

# Talons

“We will be decisive and do what we know to be right,” said the general of the Gryphon's Pride. And their orders are quite clear – to remove the “taint” from the Barrens. To liberate the Fangs for the good of the Empire and Dawn. To set on the Rahvin in the dead of night, and tear them from the mine. Those who stand against this steady conquest will be met with steel and death.

The Gryphon's Pride represents some four thousand Dawnish troops. Fourteen Dawnish captains, and one captain each from the Marches and Wintermark, have chosen to throw in their lot with the 'Pride. Perhaps six thousand soldiers, then, marching north through a Barrens already alert to the threat of further invasion. The Rahvin are not taken by surprise. As their emissary has said time and again, they are ready to fight to the last drop of blood to protect what they see as theirs. To die in battle, to cross the Howling Abyss with the aid of their ancestors, or to consign themselves to oblivion. Either way, they will die with blades in their hands.

They have not been idle, in the months since they claimed the Fangs. They have the tools, and the skills beaten into them by the Druj, to mine mithril. Not on the scale the Empire might work perhaps, but they have armed themselves, made makeshift suits of chain and metal-plate riveted to leather. They have been given a little aid by their fellow orcs – both those of the Great Forest and the Unshackled. Their numbers have been swollen by others, former allies and those who have sought out the protection of their sept. A handful of Vendarri, several dozen former septmates of the Black Wind, now reunited with the Rahvin.

The orcs have built some defences; felled logs erected as makeshift barricades. A palisade around the entrance to the

mine, to the teetering sea-stacks that rise from the Bitter Sea and the tunnels that bore through and beneath them. A village has grown up – of canvas tents, and a smattering of more permanent buildings with low thatched roofs. It is a hard existence here on the edge of the sea, where the storm-tossed waters turn the stomach and quench no thirst.

There is no discussion; the time for debate and politics is passed. The Gryphon's Pride draw up on the salt flats. The Rahvin sound what alarms they can and gather behind their meagre defences to face the inevitable charge. And then the Dawnish soldiers fall on the Rahvin like the devastating, deadly beast that is their namesake.

The Rahvin are no match for even a single Imperial army. They may have ambitions, to raise an army and reclaim their lands in the Barrens, but right now they lack the numbers and the resources to be a credible threat. They fight desperately, using every weapon at their disposal, but their commitment, their pride, their courage, cannot change the outcome.

They do not, however, fight alone.

## **Clash and Fray**

It is, of course a crime for one Imperial citizen to slay another, or even to harm them. It is also a crime for Imperial citizens to slay foreigners. For an Imperial citizen to slay another who is in the process of murdering someone protected by Imperial law? The magistrates rarely become involved to prosecute citizens who are attempting to prevent a crime.

While the Gryphon's Pride has marched north, the captains of the Empire have moved as swiftly as they may toward the Barrens. From every nation they come, to defend the Rahvin against the soldiers of Dawn. Indeed, the largest single

contingent of soldiers and captains comes from the same nation as the Gryphon's Pride – more than thirty Dawnish captains prepared to face down their own nation's army to protect people who bear little goodwill toward them. Significant forces from Varushka, Navarr, and the Imperial Orcs make the same hasty trip east, but no nation goes unrepresented in the struggle to save the Rahvin from the attack of the Pride.

Their reception is, perhaps, not what they might have hoped. The Rahvin are extremely suspicious. They have no difficulty in believing that a Dawnish army is coming to destroy them, to seize the Fangs. They have been expecting this for some time, ever since the destruction of the Montanians and the ravaging of the Black Wind. What they do not believe is that these Imperial captains – many of them clearly from Dawn and Varushka – are genuinely here to help them. They suspect a ruse, an attempt to trick them into abandoning their home, to giving up what tiny advantage they have.

The idea that they might trust in the Imperial Senate, in the machineries of the Empire, to support and protect them seems laughable to the orcs gathered at the Fangs. It will take more than words to persuade them – it will take action to show that these captains and their warbands are sincere in their desire to protect, to support, the Rahvin.

Of all those who have come to their aid, it is the Dawnish that face the most hostile opposition. It is hard for the sept to believe that the “conquerors of the Barrens” have anything but their destruction in mind. The Varushkans who have made the trip to Bitter Shore face nearly as much suspicion; the shadow of the Iron Helms and the Northern Eagle hang heavy over the Barrens, and over the Rahvin. There are some who were once Black Wind, before the Iron Helms broke them, and they speak openly against the idea that the people of the Barrens should

trust any Imperial ever again. Even in their extremis, even as the Gryphon's Pride approach, they might still turn at least some of their would-be defenders away.

Diplomacy can only do so much. The Highborn, and the Imperial Orcs in particular, do everything they can to reassure the sept that this is no trick, that these people are here to help them, sincere in their desire to protect the sept. To get them to see that all Imperial citizens, even those from the same nation, are not cut from the same cloth, do not have the same ambitions, do not see the Rahvin the same way.

They cannot save the mine, but they can save the people. They can show the Rahvin that this is not the will of the Empire, and that there is hope. That this need not be the end. Some engage in spirited debate with the Rahvin, others offer more direct aid, arming, armouring, fighting alongside the orcs as they try to hold the Gryphon's Pride at bay.

Grudgingly, the Rahvin at least allow the Imperial champions to fight with them, to face the Gryphon's Pride. Those of the sept who cannot or will not fight are escorted to safety further along the coast toward the Carmine Fields. The rest remain – taking up spear and shield, bow and axe, to face the army of Dawn that bears down on them.

## **Fall of the Fangs**

Here, then come the Gryphon's Pride. They advance in the early hours of evening, expecting to overwhelm the Rahvin with force of arms. They surge along the shore, perhaps hoping their glorious strength, their armour blazing with the light of the setting sun, their swords and shields raised in defiance, will break the spirit of the cowardly Rahvin. They must have some inkling of the presence of Imperial captains on the other side; if



the sheer number of those folk who should have been their allies gives them pause it does not slow in their resolute advance. "Those who stand against our steady conquest will meet with steel and death," said the general. So be it. Those who are against the Gryphon's Pride, against the might of Dawn, deserve what they get.

The situation is all but unprecedented. There has never in Imperial history been a situation where the Empire's protectors ripped and tore at each other on this scale. Not since the bad days before the Empire, before the peace that union of nations brought, have the people of the Bay of Catazar fought each other like this. Both sides claiming their struggle is righteous, neither side prepared to give ground to the other.

The outer defences and watchtowers fall quickly, but the palisades closer to the mine are reinforced with stout Winterfolk, cunning League, grim-faced Highborn, stubborn Marchers, as well as by heavily armoured knights of Dawn and yeofolk archers. All have faced a desperate position before, but never like this. Never like this.

While the 'Pride focus on their primary goal of seizing the mine, the soldiers of the Brass Coast, of Navarr, and of Urizen harass their flanks using the broken terrain against them. They employ hit and run tactics that pin down their reserves, sap their strength, force the 'Pride to turn some of its force towards dealing with their threat.

Fighting shoulder to shoulder against the Pride finally accomplishes what diplomacy alone could not. With Imperial warriors fighting in their defence, proving with their blood that their commitment to support the Rahvin is sincere, the leaders of the sept grudgingly accept that this is not the time to lay down their lives. As the outer defences fall, the remaining Rahvin warriors start to withdraw east along the coast. The

Imperial captains cover their retreat, preventing the Gryphon's Pride overwhelming them as they abandon the defences.

Citizens and septmates on both sides lay down their lives. As the Dawnish army fights to deliver death and steel to those who have stood against their conquest, those who have come to save the Rahvin ensure their escape. In the name of Glory the 'Pride seeks to deal a lethal blow to those who stand between them and their ambitions. In the end they are only partially successful; with the Rahvin in retreat the mine falls. Yet if the Gryphon's Pride hoped to destroy the sept, to remove any future threat posed by the orcs, they are disappointed.

The banners of the Gryphon's Pride are raised over the ramshackle sea-stacks and creaking rope bridges of the Fangs. There is some fear that the Rahvin might collapse the mine workings, as the Druj might, but there is no sign they were preparing to do so. Those captains who fought alongside the sept could explain why, if they were inclined to do so. The Rahvin expect to return, to drive the Gryphon's Pride away and reclaim the Fangs. They would not damage the mithril mine because it is a key part of their ambition to build an independent Barrens, as impossibly distant as that goal might appear as they flee east.

## **We Hold Our Breath**

The Fangs are in the hands of the Gryphon's Pride, and now belong to the Empire. The Imperial Senate can allocate them as an Imperial Bourse Seat or a National Bourse Seat under the control of Dawn.

Thanks to the Imperial captains who have aided them, the majority of the Rahvin sept has survived the attack on Bitter Shore. They have been forced to retreat, abandoning the

settlement they have fortified over the last year and a half. Despite the chaos this is no disordered rout; they may have left their homes but they have managed to take most of their possessions with them – they are well positioned to weather the winter that is to come. Perhaps more importantly, at least from their point of view, the Rahvin have taken their weapons and their armour with them. They retreat not as refugees seeking sanctuary, but as warriors preparing for a counterattack.

The Rahvin are clear that they are not defeated. With blood, the captains who came to help the sept have demonstrated beyond doubt that they have allies who might yet support them. The sacrifice of the Imperial heroes has convinced them to give the Empire a final chance to show that they can resolve this matter through diplomacy.

But one way or another, the Rahvin plan to retake the Fangs or die trying. They have spent too much blood and sweat, suffered too much, to abandon the place. Thus they have withdrawn, but the attack by the Pride has only hardened their resolve. As soon as Winter breaks they are determined to reclaim their home or die trying. If they face an Imperial army defending the Fangs this Spring then they will be wiped out. If they die fighting to recover the Fangs – and they will die if an Imperial army resists their advance – they are prepared to pay that price.

In the Barrens, a moment not of peace but anticipation. The other septs of the wild territory, and the Dawnish inhabitants of the flatlands in the east and west, reel in the aftermath of the battle at the Fangs.

The Empire holds its breath, caught between beats, waiting to see what happens next.

# Game Information

## The Barrens

- The Gryphon's Pride has taken control of the Fangs mithril mine in the Bitter Shore
- The Imperial Senate can allocate the mine as either national or Imperial
- The Rahvin have stated they will attack the mine and attempt to reclaim it this coming season
- If an Imperial army defends the mine against the attack, the Rahvin will be wiped out

Further information about the situation in the Barrens will be included as part of the Winds of Fortune in the lead-up to the Winter Solstice event. The general situation however is roughly as follows.

The Gryphon's Pride control the Fangs. Under normal circumstances it would now fall to the Imperial Senate to allocate the mine either as an Imperial Bourse Seat, or a National Bourse Seat under the control of Dawn. Given these are far from normal circumstances, either outcome is far from certain

The Gryphon's Pride has sustained casualties – killed by Rahvin and by Imperial military captains supporting them. A rough estimate suggests that around 750 Dawnish soldiers have been lost. The casualties would have been significantly higher had the military units working with the Rahvin not been more focused on saving the sept than on killing the attacking Dawnish soldiers.

The actions of those who went to save the Rahvin have bought

the sept a single season's grace. The Rahvin have been clear that they will attempt to retake the mine this season. If one (or more) Imperial armies defends the mine from that attack, then the Rahvin will be wiped out. It is not legal to attack the Rahvin while they are foreigners, but it would not be illegal to defend the mine against an attack by them.

The Imperial Senate could also declare the Rahvin to be barbarians, making it illegal to offer them further support and granting the Military Council license to attack them. This would not, however, change the nature of the crimes committed by the Gryphon's Pride and the captains who supported them.

The other septs of the Barrens know what the situation is – the Karass; the Great Forest Orcs; the Imperial citizens in Dawnguard, Murderdale, Carmine Fields, and the Plains of Teeth; the smaller bands of humans and orcs scattered across the territory are all waiting to see what happens next.

## **Participation**

- Those who supported the Gryphon's Pride, and the general of the army, have committed a crime
- Those who supported the Rahvin will not face legal repercussions
- Many of those involved have suffered grievous wounds
- The fight at the Fangs has seen numerous spontaneous spiritual auras manifest among those involved on both sides

The general of the Gryphon's Pride ordered their army to undertake an illegal attack against people under the protection of the Empire. Any Imperial captain whose military unit supported the Gryphon's Pride will likewise face the consequences for their decision. As made clear in the interlude,

characters who assigned their military unit to support this action will also face trial for murder, a crime that carries the death penalty. It is not possible to support the Gryphon's Pride without killing Rahvin warriors - foreigners - and the Imperial Roll of Honour will list anyone who supports the army.

If you supported the Rahvin, you are free to determine what element of the defence you were involved in but every unit that did so will have fought and harmed, and most likely killed, soldiers of the Gryphon's Pride. Again as outlined in the interlude, the magistrates will not seek a prosecution against those helping the Rahvin because they are satisfied that they did so in pursuit of preventing a crime.

Anyone whose military unit was assigned in the Barrens to either support the Gryphon's Pride or the Rahvin can e-mail [plot@profounddecisions.co.uk](mailto:plot@profounddecisions.co.uk) and request a lingering wound which represents a serious injury sustained in the battle. Be aware that without treatment, some of these wounds might eventually become life-threatening.

During the crucible of the fight at the Fangs, a number of spontaneous auras have manifested among fighters on both sides. You can request a spontaneous aura for your character, but the nature of the roleplaying effect it creates will depend on their motivation. In the email, you should clarify which of the motivations given here is most applicable to your character, which will influence the ribbon created. You should also state whether you would like the aura to have manifested on a weapon (and the type of weapon), or on a piece of jewellery.

For the Gryphon's Pride we will create auras for those motivated by:

- The desire to protect the rightful claim of the people of Dawn
- A belief that the Rahvin are enemies who must be destroyed

before they can harm the Empire

- The belief that violent actions are sometimes needed for the greater good.

You can pick whichever one of these three motivations most strongly motivated your character to receive the relevant aura. If you were driven by different motivations, then you won't receive an aura on this occasion.

For those who supported the Rahvin we will create auras for those motivated by:

- The need to enable the Rahvin to pursue their own future
- A belief that the Empire's laws must be upheld even when it is painful to do so
- Anger at the betrayal of the Gryphon's Pride
- The belief that sometimes violent actions are needed for the greater good.

You can pick whichever one of these four motivations most strongly motivated your character to receive the relevant aura. If you were driven by different motivations, then you won't receive an aura on this occasion.

The aura will be a standard aura similar to that created by a hallow – it won't be strong, nor will it be durable and will fade after a year or so or if removed with the appropriate liao ceremony.

## **Regarding Clemency**

When it comes to clemency, the Magistrates have offered some guidance. There are three specific elements that any defendant who wishes to seek clemency will need to satisfy; they will be called on to prove that due process was unable to deal with the situation, that the burden fell specifically on the individual to

take extreme action, and that the crime committed was proportionate to the “hero's burden”.

## **OOO Note**

- While this situation may be contentious you must bear in mind our conduct rules when discussing it

The situation in the Barrens arises as a result of in-character choices and represents a source of in-character conflict. Nobody involved on either side has done anything "wrong" out of character. As always when discussing contentious topics, bear in mind our conduct rules. It is fine to be outraged in-character, but not out-of-character, with other participants.

We anticipate that the repercussions of these events will form a significant part of the discussion at the coming event, as Imperial citizens decide how to deal with the complicated situation. The winds of fortune will contain further information, clarify specific issues and potential consequences, and lay out possible responses from the Empire to what has happened.