

CLAIM THE PRIZE

Reports from the military units that joined the orcs of the northern wastes this season are few and far between, only rumour and half-details are known. Those who journeyed into the deep woodlands of Ulnak will know more as they gather in Anvil, and it will take far longer for the civil service to compile any semblance of the truth. Exact details of what they saw won't be publicly available until after the summit - people interested in the details will need to speak with those who went to find out more.

What has been reported indicates a sizeable force of Druj have moved from Oerwealt in the north-west into the Ghul'thak Forest at the territory's heart. These orcs are arkad fighters under the banner of the Amber Scorpion, led by the buruk tepel Taramid Skinwreath. These barbarians have not moved to undertake a military operation or counter the actions of the Thule. Instead, they have undertaken a fast-paced and well-executed movement of fighters, serfs, and materiel at the behest of the vicious herbalist that commands them. The sept once dwelt in Ossium, before the Varushkans claimed that land, and it appears they are on the move once again. This information is priceless - it means that the sept will be moving their black lotus with them. This incredibly rare plant is of huge value to most orcs - capturing one would be a hammer blow to the enemy.

There is just one problem. The Thule are advancing on the Druj positions, intent on capturing any black lotus they can find in the Forest of Ulnak. It was one thing to use spies and scouts to thwart their intelligence, it is another thing entirely to swoop in and steal one of these rare plants. The Empire cannot use magic to bring several hundred fighters into pitched battle with the head of a Druj sept and then steal a black lotus plant without the Thule discovering what has happened. When that happens they are going to be furious with the Empire.

Imperial prognosticators have detected a conjunction to the Fetid Heart in the Ghul'thak Forest within Ulnak. The Sentinel Gate will enable travel to the location on the Sunday of the Summer Solstice.

OBJECTIVE: SEIZE A BLACK LOTUS PLANT

- **Thule forces are pursuing Taramid Skinwreath, a buruk tepel in possession of a rare plant of the Mallum**
- **Imperial heroes can attempt to seize the flower from the battlefield**
- **If the flower is struck or water lost from its container, the plant will die**
- **Taking this battle is guaranteed to create a major diplomatic incident with the Thule**

The Karass promised the Empire that if they sent their spies to Ulnak there would be no possibility of seizing a black lotus, but there would be opportunities to stop the Thule capturing them. It seems that the Empire's newest and perhaps questionably reliable allies have opted to under-promise and over-deliver.

The heroes of the Empire have an opportunity to capture the black lotus carried by the buruk tepel Taramid Skinwreath. Recovering the plant will not be easy however. The first step is likely need a deft strike to drive off Taramid's guards and kill the accomplished herbalist. Once Skinwreath defeated, the careful extraction of the plant itself can be attempted. It is certain that the buruk tepel and many of his subordinates in the area will fight to the death to protect the black lotus, or reclaim the plant if it is captured.

The specimen is being transported in a large shallow basin, reminiscent of a communal font found within a Highborn chapterhouse. The Karass warn that it will be heavy and require several unoccupied individuals to move it easily. The black lotus must remain within the basin as it is moved back to the portal, through the Sentinel Gate, and back to Anvil. If the lotus is struck, or the basin dropped, then the impact will destroy the delicate bloom. Likewise, if too much of the water in which the plant is sustained is allowed to slop out, then it will quickly wither from lack of moisture and perish.

OPPORTUNITY: CAPTURE THE TREASURES OF ULNAK

- **The orcs here are moving many of Skinwreath's personal valuables to safety**
- **There will be unusual and rare items to recover during the battle**
- **Magistrates caution that some of the objects recovered may be illegal in the Empire**

Skinwreath's forces are not only moving the precious black lotus away from the clutches of the Thule, they are also attempting to transport many of the Amber Scorpion's most treasured items. Some of these may amount to little more than trinkets in the eyes of the Empire - worth mere rings in a Freeborn bazaars or League emporium. Others however may have greater utility or interest to different parts of Imperial society.

One notable treasure is a sealed colony of Black Wealt Wasps. These vicious inch-long insects are incredibly territorial and will ruthlessly attack any creature that approaches their hive. The Amber Scorpion sept have learned to "domesticate" these creatures and keep nests of them around their most prized herb gardens. Adept at keeping foraging animals - or would-be thieves - away. If a nest can be recovered it would allow a citizen to upgrade a single herb garden to produce two additional realmsroot, which grow well near the wasps. However, if the nest is dropped or damaged whilst it is recovered, then the wasps may break free of their sealed hive and go on the offensive. Anyone in the immediate vicinity would be injured by repeated venomous and debilitating stings.

The Black Wealt Wasps should be fine, but the magistrates have warned that some treasures may be illegal and advised citizens to converse with the legal authorities before taking them away.

THREAT: DEFEAT YAW'NAGRAH'S HERALDS

- **Servants of Old Bloodbark are supporting the Druj barbarians in Ulnak, spreading unnatural vitality to keep the orcs fighting**
- **Far from the bounds of the Empire these heralds are able to draw more readily on their patron's power**
- **These heralds need to be targeted with Turns the Circle at magnitude 8 to destroy them**

The Green Mother is assisting the forces of Skinweath as he transports the precious black lotus plant to safety. Accompanying the orcs are a number of the Maids of the Mother, powerful mages from Yaw'nagrah's dominion in the spring realm. These alluring creatures are walking fonts of enervating magic, their every touch a powerful invocation of healing and vitality. They have been witnessed moving lithely among the orcs, healing fatal blows and restoring rent limbs with but a gesture. The presence of these heralds will bolster the already formidable capabilities of the Druj in sustaining the fighting abilities of their fighters, enabling the walking wounded to return to the fight more quickly, and helping when orcs fall during combat.

The potent spring magic that flows via the Maids of the Mother not only benefits the orcs that surround them, but strengthens their own ability to shrug off damage and knit back together injuries they sustain. Even when a herald is lain low, the healing power of the realm will swiftly regenerate their form, and they will rise again after a short time. Fatal blows that would instantly kill any other foe will not be sufficient to permanently kill one of these spring drudges. Casting Turns the Circle at magnitude 8 is required to draw on the more ruinous elements of the spring realm and turn the herald back into vegetative matter.

ENVIRONMENT: MIASMA OF DESPAIR

- **The entire battlefield is affected by an oppressive Druj miasma**
- **The miasma causes WEAKNESS unless you have a way to overcome it**

The entire area at Fetid Heart, is under the effect of the Druj miasma, a pall of potent fear that blankets the lands the Druj claim dominion over. Anyone entering the area will need to protect themselves from the clawing dread or succumb to a weakening terror that creeps into their mind.

The primary effect of the miasma is that it weakens anyone exposed to it who does not have the ability to overcome it. The easiest method to overcome the miasma is to receive an anointing, but particularly heroic individuals, or those in possession of certain enchantments or magic items may also be able to counteract the effect. In particular, those of the changeling lineage are able to fight the effects of the miasma, by only by becoming extremely angry - which can cause problems all its own.

THE KARASS CONNECTION

- **If the heroes recover a living black lotus plant the Military Council will need to decide what to do with it**
- **The Karass warn that the Empire does not have the skills required to keep the plant alive**
- **If an Imperial studies the plant it will die, but they will gain a single usable dose of black lotus powder before that happens**
- **If the Council put the plant in the care of the Karass they claim they will keep it alive**
- **The plant should be far too big for any enterprising maggot to attempt to pilfer it**

If the black lotus can be returned to Anvil, intact, then it will be down to the Military Council to decide what to do with the plant, as it is a spoil of war. The Karass claim that the Empire lacks the skills required to keep the delicate plant alive. Assuming they are telling the truth, if the the Council choose a single Imperial herbalist to study the plant it will die by the next summit - but it will be possible to harvest the seeds of the plant to make a single dose of black lotus powder.

The alternative is to place the plant in the care of the Karass's expert botanists, the rootwise led by an orc called Tannuk. They say that the rootwise will tend to the plant, keeping it alive. That will allow Imperial herbalists to learn more about the black lotus in time for the Winter Solstice - with which the Karass offer their full cooperation, as long as the plant is unharmed. The Karass are insistent that they will ensure that the Empire can have as much black lotus powder as the plant produces: they claim not to care about the seeds or the powder, but rather the survival of the plant itself, which they say is of paramount spiritual importance to all orcs.

It is entirely possible that the Karass are lying about any or all of the things they have said about the black lotus. The plant may survive if the Empire places it in the care of a skilled apothecary. Or the Karass might attempt to flee with the plant if it is put in their care. The Military Council will need to take advice and decide carefully who to trust. If they decide to take the risk of placing it in the care of the Karass, they can hand it over to the Herald of the Council who will make the arrangements.

THE THULE COMPLICATION

- **The Thule will be furious with the Empire if they steal the black lotus**
- **It will create a diplomatic incident**
- **The one thing the Thule can't do is claim this breaks the treaty**

If the Empire seize the black lotus plant, it will create a significant diplomatic incident. The Thule will quickly learn of it, and they will be fuming. They will claim that the Empire have stolen something from them of enormous value. The Empire's position is defensible, at least in legal terms, because this action doesn't actually violate the treaty. The Empire are attacking the Druj and taking the black lotus from them. The Empire could even argue that the Thule invited them to fight in the Forest of Ulnak.

Of course, the Thule will try to argue that this action violates the spirit of the treaty. The Thule are unhappy that they believe they have received precious little help in their war with the Druj - and then the Empire steals a priceless treasure out from under their nose. They are bound to make demands for some kind of reparations.