

# THE DEAD WHISPER

The orcs of the Mallum are beset by the armies of the Empire who press towards their last stronghold, the Tower of the Skink, and repulse their attempts to establish a foothold back in the Turan Flats. The situation only worsens when the Axou, who have decided the time is right to join the campaign, launch a surprise attack from the South. In Thornfen, tens of thousands of Druj fighters cower with their backs to the walls, cornered like rats. Caught between the two forces, they Druj face a threat unlike any they have ever known.

Yet, these are still Druj... corner them and they turn to fight. Even the heavy ranks of knights, cataphractii, and schlecta are hard pressed to fully contain the enemy. Warbands of elite arkad fighters are able to slip the closing ring that tightens around them. These disparate forces are under the command of the het named Rethan "Fangsnapper" and the cicatrix ritualist Vekor Amberlure. Rethan's forces are moving to strike the baggage trains of the Shield of Ipatavo, looking to cut their supplies, weakening the army and demoralizing the soldiers.

Cicatrix Vekor Amberlure has plans of her own to punish the Axou for their arrogance. One of the wardens of Cassad Úln, the massive mountain fortress that stands sentinel in the mountains of the Forest of Ulnak, they are one of the few Druj practitioners of Autumn magic. Drawing on every resource they have, the Druj have paid for a detachment of Estavus' Crucible Guard and Forge Wardens, as well as a lumbering Bronze Titan, to protect the Cicatrix - a sign of just how important this plan is.

Vekor plans to use the power of the Autumn realm to seal the Pass of the Eye that leads from Thornfen out of the Sarangrave and into the Axou territory of Kabanja. This broad pass rises up from the marshes to cross the shoulder between two great peaks. Whilst wide enough for an army to easily move through, the towering flanks make it potentially vulnerable. As has been demonstrated before in Spiral, Sermersuaq, and Kahraman, narrow mountain passes are ripe targets for sabotage to block them.

## OBJECTIVE: CONFRONT FANGSNAPPER'S FORCES

- **Het Rethan leads forces to strike the Shield of Ipatavo's encampments**
- **Engage the Druj and prevent them attacking the Axou baggage trains**
- **Every minute the Empire engage the Druj will save Axou lives**
- **Engaging the Druj for an hour or more will achieve a notable diplomatic win for the Empire**
- **If the Empire engage the enemy for less than forty minutes, the Axou will use cautious advance next season**

The "Fangsnapper" is a ruthless and savage leader of elite Druj fighters. He has snuck out from the Tower of the Skink and is aiming for the weak underbelly of the Axou army. With bow and spear and poisoned blade, these fighters are moving to ransack the baggage trains, cutting down any Axou guards foolish enough to get in their way, as well as destroying the specialised siege equipment that the Shield of Ipatavo are bringing up to deploy against the Tower of the Skink. With typical Druj cunning, Rethan is striking where it will hurt the forces of the Shield the most.

If the Empire move to decisively engage Fangsnapper they can draw his forces away from the Axou. Every minute they fight the Druj they will save lives. If they can endure for forty-five minutes or more that will be enough to allow the Axou to continue a balanced attack against the Druj this coming season. Otherwise, the casualties the Axou suffer will force them to take a cautious advance next season, which could slow the progress of the war.

If they fight the barbarians for an hour or more, then they will save many, many Axou lives, and the engagement will be considered a diplomatic triumph for the Military Council. This will shore up the shaky alliance with the secretive wizards, and overcome the bad feelings that have endured from earlier failed collaborations. Every minute counts - the longer the Empire can fight for, the stronger the Shield of Ipatavo army will be in the coming season.

How the Empire seeks to engage the Druj on the fields around Camp Askoun Orama is up to the Field Marshall and the generals of the military council. They could favour a static stance, using the defences of the camp in their favour, or adopt a more dynamic deployment that would enable them to move and counter barbarian troops as they arrive in the area.

#### **OBJECTIVE: SEIZE THE DRUJ'S RESOURCES**

- **Mages loyal to Vekor are transporting magical resources in the area**
- **Capture the ingots and measures to deny the barbarian's schemes**
- **Seizing 150 resources will prevent the Druj purchasing enough rondures from the House of Fire and Flame**
- **Otherwise, the Druj will collapse the Pass of the Eye and trap the Shield of Ipatavo in Thornfen**

Cicatrix Vekor has agreed to purchase powerful magics from the Autumn realm and then deploy them high in the Pass of the Eye. Her entourage, protected by Het Rethan's forces, are making their way through the Shield of Ipatavo's camps and heading up into the mountains for a rendezvous with heralds from House of Fire and Flame. There they will exchange a cache of magical ingots and measures in return for a supply of the Flasks of Fire and Fury. These are the same destructive rondures deployed several years ago to bring down Redgate Pass in Kahraman.

Fearing treachery from Rethan's forces, as much as attack from the forces of the Empire or Axos, Vekor has ordered the cache split between night pouches and then placed into small chests. These chests are with her most trusted followers who have spread themselves across the barbarian forces in the area. Each mage carrying a chest ensures Vekor knows where they are by lofting a simple green pennant in the air as they move up the pass. War scouts have already managed to recover two chests and discovered different numbers of resources within, making the total resources being moved by the Druj uncertain.

Imperial forces will need to hunt down the groups protecting Vekor's mages during the battle and recover the chests from them. Once found, each night pouch will need to be opened by the Day ritual Piercing Light of Revelation. If the Empire can recover a further 150 ingots or measures it will deny the Druj sufficient resources to complete their own mission. Otherwise the Druj will exchange the resources with the House of Fire and Flame for enough rondures to bring down the twin peaks into the pass.

Should this happen, the route between Sarangrave and Kabanja will be severed. This will prevent further Axos forces from reaching Thornfen or the Shield of Ipatavo from returning to their own territory. It will also break the supply route for the Axou army, which will begin to degrade over the coming season.

#### **OBJECTIVE: RECOVER AN AXOU ARTEFACT**

- **Cicatrix Vekor is in possession of a magical artefact of importance to the Axou**
- **The Axou have asked the Ambassador to make arrangements to return it, if they can**

Vekor Amberlure is in possession of a rare citadel mask. Named "The Rebuker of the Unwanted", the mask is a foci that aids the casting of the winter warding rituals: Hold Back the Frozen Hunger, There Is No Welcome Here and Ward of the Black Wastes. Crafted over four centuries ago to combat threats faced by the Axou; the knowledge of its creation was lost when the controversial artisan who fashioned it was executed as a traitor to their citadel. Unremarkable in look and appearance, it was stolen during the invasion of Axos nearly a decade ago - the Axou would very much like it back

The Axou have sent a desperate message for the attention of 'Shacklebreaker' Thanmir Hrafnar, the Ambassador to the Axou asking for help recovering the artefact. If Imperial forces are able to recover the stolen mask - the Axou expect their ambassadorial counterpart to ensure it is returned to its rightful owners. They haven't been so gauche as to put a price on the mask, but clearly the ambassador Thanmir could use the mask as leverage. That would need to be handed carefully to avoid upsetting the notoriously touchy Axou - the safer option would be to simply ask for a reward for its safe return.

## **BATTLEFIELD OPPORTUNITY: RESCUE THE URIZENI CAPTIVES**

- **Five Urizeni soldiers are being held captive by the Druj**
- **Who they are and why they were in the area is unknown**
- **Locate and free the captives, then return them to Anvil**

War scouts have reported a small group of Urizen soldiers currently held prisoner by the Druj. The information passed to the prognosticators has so far been unable to identify the individuals or the spire from which they hail. The Urizeni egregore is also unable to identify them, suggesting that some sort of shrouding is involved, or the miasma that pervades the area is masking them from perception. That the group has not chosen to take the Gift of Kaela suggests that they either have important knowledge pertinent to their predicament and the Empire, or are hoping for rescue.

The opportunity presented here by the civil service is clear; find and free the captives, ensure they are healed and ministered to as best they can be, then return them safely to Anvil.

## **BATTLEFIELD ENVIRONMENT: MIASMA OF DESPAIR**

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

The entire area at Camp Askoun Orama, 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.

## **BATTLEFIELD ENVIRONMENT: WHISPERS OF THE DEAD**

- **Axou ghosts move across the battlefield and offer tactical insights against the Druj**
- **Characters who are anointed or affected by the miasma cannot benefit from the ghosts**
- **Anyone else can roleplay that they can hear the ghost's voices at any time**
- **Once per battle, an affected character can use five seconds of appropriate roleplaying to be empowered by the ghosts**
- **An empowered character can make a single heroic call based on the weapon they are using within the next 10 seconds, as if they were the target of the Empower spell**

The Axou near Camp Askoun Orama have beseeched the ghosts bound to the army to guide and assist their allies in battle. Invisibly passing across the battlefield, the ghosts observe and watch the orcs arrayed against them. If one is careful and concentrates on their sibilant whispers, they can impart keen tactical advice, or point out weaknesses in the defences of a foe. Once per battle, this timely guidance can enable a keen warrior the perfect opportunity to bypass armour, sever an exposed limb, or knock an opponent from their feet after five seconds of appropriate roleplaying.

Characters that are under the effects of an anointing or who are suffering from Weakness (from the miasma or any other source) cannot benefit from the ghosts. The ghosts appear to shy away from anointed characters.