

Forest of Ulnak Spy Network E2-2024

This physical report is an out-of-character briefing sheet, rather than an in-character report. We ask players not to share these briefings around until after the event at the earliest. It is intended to be used to create stories about what the characters involved have done since the Winter Solstice.

The total military strength of the scouts committed to the Forest of Ulnak totals sixteen hundred strength. The forces here is serving under Arnulf, Radzic Kobila of Skallitz, Matthias, Escalados de Carsenere, Ancon, Toriith, Turburt Orc-Slayer, Gawain the Hunter, Caladain de Renard, Luicen De Coeurdefer, Archavion Wolfborne, Owain Wolfborne, Pelinal Swansong of Dawn and Zachariah of Highguard.

Overview

The Forest of Ulnak is part of the Mallum, controlled by the Druj, and ruled over by the buruk tepel of Cassad Ūln. It borders Ossium, the Barrens, the Salt Flats of Sanath and an unknown territory to the north. The only territory known to the Empire that could be considered similar is Brocéliande; the entire territory is covered in a vast, ancient woodland. It is warmer than Ossium and significantly wetter; much of the territory has a similar climate to Therunin.

The largest settlement is Shadowmere which expands across the vast marshlake of the Shifting Basin. There are scattered homesteads throughout the territory; often built up into the vast trees with bridges linking them. The only area that sees extensive use of stone is Deathsgate and the intimidating fortress of Cassad Ūln.

Points of Interest

Shadowmere

In the centre of the Shifting Basin, on the northern edge of the vast wetlands that eventually lead to the Barren Sea, is the start of the settlement of Shadowmere. This sprawling settlement has a population similar to that of Meade or Cargo. The town has few buildings that are not in the marshlands themselves, mostly consisting of warehouses storing lumber and other goods from elsewhere in the territory. The vast majority of the settlement spreads across the marsh on pilings and stilts, often connected by walkways and rope bridges. Inhabitants use canoes, rats, and nets to catch the fish and birds that make their homes in the marsh. Shadowmere is controlled by the formidable Ormthak Longbarb, a warlord whose grim epithet comes both from their favoured weapon - a powerful magical pole-arm - and their use of long fishhook on captured enemies and traitors.

Sacred Grove

There is a weirwood grove near the centre of Deathsgate that appears to be more than "just" a weirwood grove. Scouts report that a variety of ceremonies are performed there. There are also indications that a number of slaves from the Great Forest Orcs sept of the Barrens are kept here, forced to tend the trees for their Druj masters. They live in dreadful conditions, clearly suffering punishment for the "treachery" of their families in the Barrens, but the Druj clearly relish their expertise enough that they keep them alive rather than make an example of them.

Estimates suggest that the Sacred Grove provides 27 wains of weirwood each season with the support of the treetenders. If that support was lost then production would be reduced to around 19 wains a season.

The Great Pit

There is a great and terrible mine cut deep into the roots of the vast mountains that guard against whatever lies beyond the northern border. Hundreds spend their entire lifetimes in the Great Pit, toiling ceaselessly to provide stone and ore for their Druj masters.

Estimates suggest the mine provides only 12 wains of white granite each season with the current situation. It is possible that production could be increased to around 18 wains a season given sufficient investment.

Cassad Ūln

In the north of Deathsgate the imposing fortress of Cassad Ūln is built into the mountains. At its centre is a tall spire of black stone that cuts into the sky as it rises away from the mountains that are the border to the north. Roughly a mile away from the intimidating spire is a twenty-foot-high wall adorned with spikes and grisly trophies. Communication with locals suggests that the dungeons of the fortification stretch as far into the earth as the tower stands above. Cassad Ūln is the home of a powerful buruk tepel whose mastery of the herbal arts of poison and fear is unparalleled.

As with many Druj fortifications, this massive castle would be very dangerous to assault. Casualties suffered when laying siege to or storming it would be increased by a half.

Ring of Trials

In southern Goul'Thak Forest stands the Ring of Trials; an open space cleared from the thick forest large enough to fit all the tents in Anvil. Thick, spiky bones have been planted in the ground at irregular intervals across the ground. The Ring of Trials appears to be used by the Arkad to test and train their potential recruits, and more recently it has been used in the raising of the "Thorn Born".

The Broken Crater

In the north of the Shifting Basin there is a deep lake mostly avoided by the territory's inhabitants; instead it has been claimed by a small group of ghulai who practice Night magic. Tales from the locals suggest that the lake was created centuries ago when a star fell in fear of the Druj. The secretive ghulai reportedly have some form of an agreement to provide the buruk tepel with star-metal from the lake in exchange for being left alone there.

Estimates suggest the Broken Crater provides only 3 rings of ilium each season.

The Chained Trees

In the centre of Goul'thak Forest stands five immense trees in a rough circle and the ground around these giants is a desolate wasteland. Thick chains of what appear to be iron and bronze weave between the trees binding them together. The chains are clearly magical in some form as even in the strongest gales they don't move. Nobody has been able to get close enough to find out more details, and those who have tried have recounted that the closer they get to the chains the harder they find it to move - either toward the chains or crucially away from them. One scout needs to be dragged out with a rope by their companions, although they found it no harder to move their companion than they would to drag them out of a marshy bog. There are remains of animals in the vicinity who seem to have starved to death after approaching too close to the accursed glade.

Druj Miasma

There is a heavy and oppressive aura of despair and fear that hangs over the entire territory. Any attempt by non-Druj armies to attack a region that is covered in the Druj miasma will find it extremely difficult to gain land. In addition, due to the long history of traps and how hostile the wilds of the territory are, any non-Druj army that takes an order that increases land gained suffers additional casualties.

Strategic Considerations

Due to the nature of the Broken Crater it is only possible for an army to attack into Deathsgate from either the Bonewall or Gloomsea.

Due to the nature of the Nameless River it is only possible to attack into Grimfen Minre or the Shifting Basin from the Barrens; the GULthak forest is the only region that can be attacked from the south.

The only pass wide enough to allow an army to cross the mountains to the north is dominated by Cassad Uln; an army would literally need to go *through* the fortification.

Regions

Grimfen Mire

•Qualities: Marsh, Forest

The damp woodlands of Grimfen Mire are bursting with life: pervasive insects, vicious animals, toxic fungi, hunting birds, and all over a soft cladding of moss. This region is home to at least a dozen extended families that live in homesteads under the ironclad rule of the Druj; the only thing that links them is that they all suffer under the rule of the buruk tepel. In addition to providing warriors and supplies for the armies of the Druj, these clans must send one of their most promising apothecaries every year to Cassad Ūln; to serve, and learn, and become tepel. There are rumours of a small enclave of humans known as the "Dreamers" who provide glimpses of visions and prophecy to the Druj in exchange for safety.

Oerwealt

•Qualities: Forest, Haunted

Oerwealt was the first region encountered by the Empire, it was here that Imperial armies first invaded at the end of 383YE. The region is entirely without the roads that are so common to the west, and the few paths that exist are little more than overgrown tracks through the incomprehensibly old forests. Throughout the region there is evidence of long-dead villages: rusty, discarded pieces of metal, long rotten frames for houses, and bones. Bleached and weathered bones are found in clumps near the long-abandoned settlements, and when night falls and the sun sets the settlements are often haunted by the ghosts of these long-dead orcs.

To the north rises the steep, high mountains that dominate the northern border of the territory.

The Bonewall

•Qualities: Hills

The colossal mountains of northern Oerwealt continue in the north of the Bonewall; the bones of untold generations are displayed hanging from outcroppings. The carved, menacing entrance that leads down to the white granite mine known as the Great Pit is nestled at the foot of a mountain in the north-east of the region. Slightly to the south are foothills - dotted with mines - that rise to meet the daunting mountain range. Forests that are home to several different species of venomous serpents dominate the lowest of the foothills.

Ghul'thak Forest

•Qualities: Forest, Aware

The trees of Ghul'thak Forest are different to those in the rest of the territory. The species are by and large the same but there is something else, some otherness that permeates through the region. Anyone who walks under the trees cover experiences a feeling of being watched

and judged. There are a number of smaller villages spread throughout the forest along with rumours of a larger settlement deeper within the forest.

Even without venturing too far into the region the strange sight that has been given the uninspired name of "bloodtrees". The recently deceased are hung from trees and left to rot as their blood runs down to stain the bark. There are no sightings of skeletons hanging from trees, nor around their trunk, so clearly they are removed at some point but details of to where and by whom are unknown.

On the southern edge of the region, along the border of the Nameless River, is the Thistle of Barbs; a mass of interwoven branches that bristle with thorns.

Shifting Basin

•Qualities: Marsh, Forest, Shroudblessed

The Shifting Basin is dominated by an enormous lake surrounded by marshland. In the centre, and far into the lake, stands the largest settlement in the region; Shadowmere. Amongst the wetlands and bogs are slow-moving rivers that flow from the south to the north and to the eastern coast. This is by far the most populated region in the whole territory and sees goods from as far away as the Salt Flats of Sanath and Sarangrave.

To the north of the region is the deep lake known as the "Broken Crater", which is avoided by the inhabitants of the territory. There is a tower that overlooks the lake inhabited by ghulai who specialise in Night magic. Any clouds that near the tower take on an iridescent hue as they pass over.

Gloomsea

•Quality: Coastal, Mistwreathed

The shallow waters of the Gloomsea are scattered with small islands, similar to those found in Free Landing or the Cazar Straits. The rocky archipelago is usually shrouded by curling, rolling mists that make travel across the Gloomsea challenging not least because they hide the presence of sharp-edged rocks beneath the surface. The other risk comes from the sept who make their home on the islands. "The Hathjuk" are a sept of the Druj who keep to the islands; they use quick ships to move between the isles and navigate through the treacherous waters by ancient paths passed down through generations. Imperial scouts have, for obvious reasons, not been able to visit most of the islands here and so much of the region remains unknown.

Deathsgate

•Qualities: Forest

Deathsgate has the only pass north; controlled by the sinister fortification Cassad Ūln. Here the great buruk tepel that watches over the territory sits and plots; focused on some threat

from the north. The boundless mountains that dominate the Bonewall continue through northern Deathsgate, eventually reaching the coast in the east. The south of the region, on the northern shore of the Broken Crater is a large forest dotted with herb gardens whose bounty go towards the buruk tepel and their apprentices. In the centre of the region is the Sacred Grove; a stand of weirwood trees that also serve as a place of ceremony for the Druj.