

The Retreat from Reinos

Preparation

The Lasambrian hills at the height of Summer are hot and arid. Your company is met in western Segura by representatives of the Hierro clan of orcs. They are cautious, but welcoming. They escort you the rest of the way to where the main Hierro force is camped, some fifty miles from the border.

The Lasambrian warriors are a sizable force – perhaps four thousand in total, perhaps slightly less. It is clear though that they are nowhere near at full strength. They are battle-weary and tired. And, of course, they are all orcs, and suspicious orcs at that. While they understand that Imperial forces are here to fight alongside them, they are by absolutely no means universally welcoming. Nothing is said to your face, but you feel hard stares on you. Sometimes a group of orcs will spontaneously break into mocking laughter, or make inaudible comments as you pass.

The more senior members of the tribe – the general, and the chieftain of the tribe in particular – are much more welcoming. The longer you spend with the orcs, the more tolerant they become – thanks to the effect of Bound By Common Cause, the potent enchantment placed on the Hierro army by Imperial magicians. The Hierro army is very different to an Imperial army – it is closer to a horde than a true fighting force. It is subdivided along family lines, more an amalgamation of lots of small raiding groups than a true army. Discipline is lax – the largest and strongest orcs essentially do more-or-less what they like.

There are also plenty of hints at the Hierro's recent activity, both as invaders of Segura and bandits preying on Imperial and Faraden caravans passing through their territory. A flash of ragged Freeborn finery here, a suit of battered Faraden armour there; a one-eyed veteran wields a shield that might once have belonged to a Dawnish knight-errant, despite the red and white paint smeared across its surface. A green recruit carries a spear with distinctive Navarri markings, hung with crude silver beads and black feathers.

At a rough estimate you would say that the Hierro are accompanied by three-thousand Imperial soldiers drawn from across the Empire. The majority are from Wintermark and Varushka – but all ten nations are represented including the Imperial orcs.

The Imperial orcs receive a cool reception, despite the enchantment. The Lasambrian orcs are not hostile as such, they simply treat them with suspicion – they ask multiple questions about where the Imperial orcs come from; who their family is; and most especially, where they live. There is a distinct clannishness to them – they close ranks whenever a group of Imperial orcs comes close and in response, perhaps unconsciously, the Imperial orcs respond in the same way.

The Hierro clan are not the only orcs gathered here. The orcs of the Corazón are a very different matter. Where the Hierro orcs are fractious and a little sneaky, the orcs of the Corazón clan are serious and even somewhat disciplined. They hail from the northern regions of Reinos, and it is their clan lands that are being conquered by the invading Jotun. Their army is smaller than the Hierro – they have borne the brunt of the fighting so far – and they are much more ambivalent to the Empire. The Hierro commanders warn Imperial citizens – and especially Imperial orcs – to stay away from the Corazón encampments. While the northernmost Lasambrian clan does not hate the Empire, they are not as friendly with the humans as the Hierro are.

Conspicuous by their absence are the third clan of the Lasambrian hills, the Naguerro. The “witches” of the southern hills are nowhere to be seen. The Hierro initially try to deflect questions about where they have gone but eventually are forced to come clean.

After the Hierro pitched the Imperial strategy to the other two clans (to abandon southern Lasambria to the Iron Confederacy and focus on fighting the Jotun), the Naguerro broke off their alliance with the

Hierro and the Corazón and withdrew all their troops into Kalino (the other Lasambrian Hills territory, to the south-east). The Hierro try to gloss over this incident, claiming that the Naguerro made poor allies anyway, compared to the Empire, but they are unconvincing.

The reason for this split is that all the Naguerro clan-lands are in Kalino, the four easternmost regions in fact (the Hierro occupy three regions in each of the two territories, while the Corazón held the four regions in the north of Reinos). The good news, claims on Hierro brightly, is that once the Jotun are defeated, the Hierro and Corazón, and their new Imperial allies, will be in a position to drive the Iron Confederacy out of Kalino and the Naguerro will come back to the alliance “with their heads bowed.”

There is some comment to the effect that the Naguerro are good at fighting in hills, and this will help them slow the Iron Confederacy down until the Hierro and their Imperial friends are ready to come to their rescue.

Anyone with eyes on one of the Corazón when this claim is made will note that they keep their faces studiously blank, and withdraw soon afterward. There are other warning signs that all is not well between the Hierro and the Corazón, but for now their alliance is holding. According to one report of a guarded conversation between a Wintermark thane and a Corazón, the northern clan are unhappy that the Naguerro have gone because their expertise in fighting in hills was one of the things that was slowing the Jotun advance.

There were also three thousand of them. There is an implication that the Corazón do not believe that three thousand Imperial soldiers will make up for their absence. There is also a strong implication that the Corazón are not happy that the Hierro were prepared to throw the Naguerro clan lands away to secure their alliance with the Empire.

Campaign

There are around seven thousand Lasambrian orcs in the resistance force, plus three thousand Imperial soldiers.

There are estimated to be thirty thousand Jotun opposing them.

The Hierro are canny fighters; anyone who has fought them in Segura knows that they favour the heavier armours, and prefer to fight with large shields when they can. Their claims to strategic brilliance might be taken with a pinch of salt but there is no question that they are good at what they do. They are actually good at defensive fighting, and know just how to turn the broken terrain of the hills to their advantage. The Corazón are much more prone to hit-and-run tactics. It seems their main experience has been attacking trade caravans and isolated farmsteads to the east and the west. They are good at fighting in small groups, but have a marked tendency to think in terms of short term victory rather than long – they are the first to start looting the fallen Jotun.

Not that there are very many fallen Jotun to loot.

The Lasambrian orcs are outnumbered three-to-one, even with their Imperial allies, and outclassed. The Jotun are a wall of flesh and steel that anticipates and counters the Lasambrian tactics. While the Lasambrians are relying on a solid defence, the Jotun attackers are using a variety of strategies and tactics. The worst engagements are those between the Lasambrians and an army of Jotun that contains a large number of Ulvenwar (elite warriors who wrap themselves in the pelt of animals, and tattoo their face and body). This army is extremely adept at finding and exploiting weaknesses in the Lasambrian Orc strategies.

Resolution

The Lasambrian orcs lose the campaign, and they lose badly. They are driven back time and again – and while the presence of the Imperial troops slows the advance of the Jotun it cannot come close to countering it.

In the end, the Jotun force conquers and claims the entire northern clan-lands of the Corazón and makes inroads into the territory of the Hierro. Despite their defensive strategy, over two thousand Lasambrian orcs are killed or captured in the three-months of the campaign. Imperial casualties are negligible; the elite military units provide invaluable assistance and escape relatively unscathed but it does that all the losses are taken by the Hierro and the Corazón.

Two weeks before the Autumn Equinox, the remainder of the Corazón clan break their alliance with the Hierro and surrender to the Jotun. They face the Choice – to join the Jotun as warriors, or to become thralls.

The most likely reason they have chosen this course of action is that the Jotun control their homes (including, if rumour is to be believed, at least one working mithril mine). Part of their motivation, however, must surely come from their growing dissatisfaction with the Hierro alliance with the Empire (and what is seen as a betrayal of the Naguerro to get it).

Rumour also suggests that a diplomatic envoy from the Hierro sought out one of the Jotun Jarls and attempted to broker a peace deal. According to the rumour, the Jotun rebuffed the Hierro's advances entirely; there would be no negotiation. The Hierro surrender, or they die. There may not be any truth to this tale, but it is heard in several places.

There are other rumours swarming around the camp-fires as the broken Hierro army retreats south and east, south and east. According to the news from Kalino, the Iron Confederacy advance has been slowed, perhaps even turned back. The Naguerro have received aid from an unexpected source. A major force of Grendel orcs, including a great number of war-ships, has made landfall on the eastern shores of the Lasambrian hills. At least two armies of Grendel are reported to have joined the Naguerro. It is doubtful they can truly hold the Iron Confederacy back, but for now they are providing them with a significant challenge.

In the end, the Hierro are faced with a tough decision - with their alliance in tatters, and the Jotun advancing relentlessly through their lands, they cannot survive another season of war with the Jotun. The Imperial troops are useful, but every orc death brings their army one step closer to collapsing.

As they travel south and east, they gather their remaining population around them, and cross the border into Segura. Abandoning Lasambria, they look for sanctuary within the Empire.

Game Information

You are welcome to use this information as you see fit – but this document is out-of-character and should not be shown to other characters during the event. Instead please use it as the basis of your roleplaying regarding the events described.

You might have personally fought alongside your military unit, or you might have gleaned some or all of this information from a written report from one of your lieutenants.

Assisting the Hierro in this fashion does not earn your military unit any production.

