

Marracossan Mercenary Work

Summer 383YE

Overview

This represents out-of-character information. You can use it freely to create stories of your character's experiences in Asavea, but please do not simply give it to other players to read until after the event.

The Asavean Archipelago lies far to the west of the Empire, and reaching it entails a long ocean voyage. Whether your forces travel by Imperial trading ship, or seek passage with an Asavean or Sarcophan ship – or were already in the Archipelago from the previous season the journey is equally uneventful.

Your journey to the Asavean Archipelago has not gone unmarked; agents of the Assembly of Vigilance have certainly included your name on the list of captains fighting in Asavea this season.

Liberation

The climate in Asavea is closest to the warmest parts of the Brass Coast. As the Empire swelters in the Summer heat, temperatures in the far west soar to almost unendurable levels. Imperial visitors - especially those from Wintermark and Varushka - are often unprepared for the oppressive heat. There are stories of soldiers from those nations collapsing on duty, or suffering from sunburn strong enough to cause serious damage. Only the lowest rank of slaves toil beneath the noonday sun; the idea of actually fighting under such conditions is almost inconceivable.

Imperial Mercenaries are sent straight away to the province of Marracoss, to join the *Arrow of the Deeps* army under General Alexander Carravo at the siege of Fort Maragladia.

Their first port of call is the town of Sulesca, where they are met on the docks by a small contingent of Asaveans including a priest of the Red God and one of the General's aides. The Asaveans quickly assess the captain, asking insightful questions about the composition of their force and details of their experience and training. They are then given assignments and sent north to join General Carravo's army. It seems the Imperial mercenaries are being distributed throughout the army – not with any sinister agenda but in an attempt to ensure they get the most value from the mercenary troops.

The docks at Sulesca are heaving with Asavean troops. In addition to the Imperial mercenaries there are a great many military captains loyal to the Plenum who have come to join the battle at Sulesca and moving north toward Maragladia. Two navies – the *Spear of the Sea* has brought the *Sword of Asav* from Emphedor, while the *Winter Star* under Praeceptorem Aulus Paulinus has transported the *Blade of the Goddess*, and a mercenary army called the *Free City Company* preparatory to themselves joining the siege of the coastal fortress.

The Free City Company is heavily reinforced with siege engineers whose machines put those employed last season by the Nemorians to shame, and with professional mercenaries from across Asavea and many of the nearby smaller nations. A surprising number of the Free City Company soldiers speak passable Imperial – they seem to pride themselves on mastering languages as well as mastering the arts of war.

The Blade of the Goddess is the army under the direct command of the High Priest of the Red God of War, who is also the Minister for Military Procurement, a high ranking official in the Nemorian government. He immediately assumes command of the operating in Marracoss, to the slight annoyance of some of the Asavean commanders.

Last army to arrive is the *Ire of the Kraken*, and army of hard-bitten warriors from the south-west renowned for their resilience, and for their merciless nature. Banners adorned with many-armed black monsters flutter in their midst as they disembark from the vessels of the *Thundering Deeps* – a third navy under the command of the bloodthirsty draughir Praeceptorem Popea Juliani. Other soldiers mutter and surreptitiously make the sign against evil – the Ire of the Kraken and the Thundering Deeps alike have a bad reputation and nobody likes fighting alongside them – yet there is no doubt that they are effective at what they do. The reason for this superstitious dread is not explained to outsiders – the closest anyone can get is a muttered

comment about the gods honoured by the commanders of the Kraken and the Deeps.

The armies and navies move north to join the Trident of Storms and the Arrow of the Deeps at Maragladia.

The *Spear of the Sea* is clearly being supported by a number of vessels with predominantly orc crews – Grendel mercenaries. The Asavean officers are at pains to keep Imperial and Broken Shore troops from interacting in any way although at times that is a little difficult.

Soldiers and Slaves

Most of the soldiers fighting alongside the Imperials consider themselves *Asaveans* but not *Nemorians*. They are reasonably happy to discuss matters with Imperial citizens – what seems at first confusing becomes easier to understand if one thinks of the satrapies as being akin to the nations of the Empire. “Asavean” means someone who lives under the *Pax Nemoria* – something equivalent to being “Imperial” in some ways.

Almost all the soldiers of the Arrow of the Deeps bear the black-and-red tattoos that mark them as veterans of at least one campaign against the enemies of Asavea. Officers tend to be part of the priesthood of the Red God, as well as having rank within the Asavean military. Some practice openly as priests while others seem to be more in the nature of "champions" of the God of War. Imperials who wish to do so are welcomed to religious services dedicated to the God, and encourage to make sacrifices of blood or coin. Any who wish are allowed to purchase minor enchantments from magician-priests, although the prices charged for outsiders are not low.

Morale varies. The newly arrived soldiers appear confident the rebels are on their last legs – that the glorious armies of Asavea will soon wash over them like a triumphant wave. Early losses are written off as the result of poor planning; of the generals of *other* armies underestimating the cunning of their opponents.

The soldiers who have fought against the defenders of Maragladia are a little less optimistic – the last attempt to take the fortification was a disastrous loss that claimed many lives. Still, the reinforcements that have arrived to support them mean that even the most pessimistic believes that the victory of the Plenum forces is just a matter of time.

Not only Imperial mercenaries fight with the Nemorians. There are friendly Sarcophan troops armed with crossbows and pikes, and more standoffish Jarmish irregulars using a combination of military might and battle-magic, both supporting the Free Cities Company.

While most of the people on the Marracoss campaign are soldiers, there are slaves everywhere. They work in the fields around Sulesca, in the houses of the wealthy, and all over the army camps serving food, cleaning, and digging latrines. They are all human, and few show any sign of possessing lineage. They keep their eyes downcast, and do not speak to anyone who is not a fellow slave unless spoken to first.

The field slaves are generally either working or slouching back to their barracks in exhaustion, but the town and house slaves seem to have a better quality of life than might have been expected. They are fed, and watered, and while their duties are onerous there are few signs of abuse or cruelty.

There is some talk about the lot of slaves under the regime of the rebels. It is apparently much worse in Maragladia, with reports of starving slaves being worked to death in desperation as the Nemorian-lead armies draw ever closer. It is difficult to tell if these are true accounts, or hyperbolic tales designed to discourage people from joining the rebels. Perhaps a little bit of each.

Thantabar

There is still fighting raging in the north-west, in the region of Thantabar. The Asavean Star Fishers are engaged in battle against the former Shield of the North – now calling themselves the Defenders of Maracoss. The Shield were once a respected army believed loyal to the Plenum whose charismatic commander General Valo surprised everyone at the start of the insurrection by joining the rebels.

There is a long standing rivalry between General Valo and General Vigia, the commander of the Star Fishers. It seems the two armies are locked in bitter struggle in Thantabar, but the reports are that Valo is being pushed slowly northwards.

When news comes that Valo has been forced to retreat – the Defenders of Maracoss practically routed from the field – it is greeted with cautious optimism by the Asavean soldiers. Not least because the Defenders are forced to fight their way through the Arrow of the Deeps and the Trident of Storms to take refuge in Fort Maragladia.

Rebels

Many of the rebel forces are armed with poor quality weapons and armour - in some cases obviously repurposed tools or family relics – but they are in the minority. New steel swords and spears are very much in evidence. Some soldiers blame the Sumaah, but many of these accoutrements of war look a lot like the weapons and armour being wielded by many of the Asaveans albeit in slightly different styles - which would imply that they have outfitted themselves. Still others are clearly of Imperial make, which leads to an increase in tension between Imperial mercenaries and Asavean troops. The news quickly spreads that Imperial war profiteers are supplying arms and armour to the rebels of Maragladia.

There are also clear signs of Sumaah influence. Among the rebel Marracossan troops there are obvious units of Sumaah soldiers. They tend to wear pale mantles, and adorn their helmets with white feathers, but there is no mistaking that these are skilled professional warriors on par with the best the Empire has to offer. They fight alongside the Marracossans, supporting their positions with zeal and martial skill. The few who are captured are immediately executed - there is no attempt to interrogate them. According to the Asaveans, there is no point - they have learnt through harsh experience that the Sumaah fanatics will die before they will do anything other than curse their captors. It is widely known they use a powerful drug that makes them immune to torture and fills them with a mad lust for battle.

There are also reports of Imperial mercenaries fighting with the Marracossan rebels, and this further contributes to the sometimes awkward atmosphere in the barracks and mess tents. There is apparently a significant contingent of them, unlike in earlier seasons. The Asavean soldiers tend to assume they are “religious fanatics” rather than sensible pragmatic mercenaries like those assigned to the Arrow of the Deeps.

Maragladia

Built to protect northern Asavea from external threats, the fortress of Maragladia is breathtaking. An immense stone structure that covers an entire island, accessible by three mighty stone bridges and with a great sweeping white-granite seawall. It is a massive construction – a great fortress to challenge the Silent Sentinel or the Walls of Temeschwar. Worse, there is obviously an enchantment in place reinforcing the walls even further. Massive obsidian-skinned giants patrol the walls – each easily as tall as three soldiers stood on one another's shoulders – each with a single burning eye, one horn and a massive barbed spear that glows like a campfire at night. The giants hurl the spears with killing force, and then conjure new ones as if from nowhere to fight in melee against any who come within reach.

The Generals favour a siege, but the High Priest of the Red God has different idea. Despite the failure of the earlier attack, the will of the Plenum is that Maragladia and its rebel defenders are utterly crushed.

Six weeks after the Spring Equinox, with all the forces in position, the assault begins.

More than thirty thousand Asavean soldiers storm Fort Maragladia from the landward side. They are supported by more than sixty Asavean warbands lead by independent captains and twenty or so bands of Imperial mercenaries. At the same time, around fifteen thousand warships launch a coastal assault with the aid of an estimated fifteen fleets of orc mercenaries and three times that many vessels commanded by independent Asavean captains.

Maragladia is defended by its garrison – somewhat depleted but still a significant force and supported by supernatural creatures conjured from the Summer realm; by the remaining Defenders of Maracoss; by the

remaining soldiers of the Shield of the North; by Imperial mercenaries; and by twenty bands of Sumaah warriors.

The defenders fight desperately and hold the walls against the overwhelming Plenum force for as long as they can.

The docks fall first – the quayside conquered by the Asavean marine detachments and their orc allies – and then one of the main gatehouses collapses before the sustained assault of the siege engines brought by the Free City Company.

Fort Maragladia falls to the Plenum.

Terentia Comasigne herself is reported dead, along with half of the remaining rebel leaders.

The tattered remnants of the *Pride of Aracossa* are forced to quit the Fort, retreating back toward the capital, to Aracossa. The shattered remains of the rebel council flee with them. The remaining Defenders of Maracoss – the former Shield of the North - surrender to the victorious Plenum forces.

By the order of the High Priest of the Red God, one in every seven of the captured rebels are executed, although no Imperial is required to take part in such activity. It seems the Asaveans prefer to execute their criminals by drowning in the sea. The method varies, but with so many prisoners to dispatch they are simply weighted down, their hands and feet tied, and hurled from the walls of the fortress into the waters below.

Their bodies are left bobbing in the waves.

Even with such mass executions, however, prisoners are always offered a chance to receive a blessing from the grim-faced priests of the God of Death and Thresholds who travel with the army; the majority refuse scornfully.

One group of prisoners are spared from execution. The soldiers of the Shield of the North are imprisoned and interrogated but most of them are left alive. The former Asavean general Valo is discovered already imprisoned along with a number of his officers. Apparently the rebel council turned against the formerly popular leader of the Shield of the North when he refused to abandon Thantabar in pursuit of his personal vendetta against General Vigia.

As Valo and his captured officers are members of prominent families, they are taken into custody by the High Priest of the Red God, and transported south to face the judgement of the Nemorian Plenum.

Contract's End

There is still work to be done in Marracoss, but there will be no opportunity for Imperial mercenaries to participate. A week after the fall of Fort Maragladia, news reaches the armies that the Imperial Synod has profoundly insulted the people of Asavea by defacing and desecrating images of the Gods.

While the High Priest of the Red God and many of the Asavean commanders would be happy to continue employing mercenaries from the Empire, the instructions of the Plenum make this impossible.

Summary

- The rebel armies lost Thantabar and Maragladia. The Fort is now in Plenum hands.
- The Defenders of Maracoss surrendered to the victorious Plenum forces, while the shattered remnant of the *Pride of Aracossa* have retreated to Aracossa.
- The territory of Maracoss is now back in Asavean hands; only the region of Aracoss is still controlled by the rebels.
- During the campaign, your troops will have engaged with the enemy and will have fought and killed Nemorian (Asavean) soldiers. You may also roleplay that your forces have fought and killed Imperial mercenary soldiers if you wish.

