

MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON SPY NETWORK

Autumn Equinox 832YE

Apart from the map, 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 this season.

Aided by the Penumbra Watcher, Imperial forces have committed an effective total strength of over three thousand to the spy network in the Mountains of the Moon. This is sufficient to gain an overview of the territory, including the presence of military forces, and determine precise details of armies, fortifications and bourse resources.

The forces scouting the Barrens this season include Leon of Dawn; the Highborn Barachel of Adina's Charge, Cayleb, Nicanor, Jada, Ezra, child of Emanue, Jacob, and Zarah, daughter of Zelophehad; Ashborn Raur of the Imperial Orcs; the Navarr Rodric Worldscribe; Bernard Dugdale and Famished Jack of the Marches; Belisarius Blackheart, Philostrate, Lochias Of Oblivion's Edge, Lanus, and Antimedes of Invidia from Urizen; the Varushkan Yulia Kasimirova Voronov; and Ethelwulf Argonning, Hadand Dunwulf, Ubbe Dunning, Kindra Edasdottir, Raeden, Elva, Aldwyn Fjellrevening, and Grizzly Dunwolf of Wintermark.

Overview

The Mountains of the Moon - called the Mountains of Silence by the Axou - lie between the Empire and Axos, to the east of Spiral and Zenith, south of the Barrens and Therunin. Gaining access is very difficult; the mountains create a ring of stone that in many places proves impassable. The first challenge faced by Imperial scouts is finding a way through the high peaks. The only route that is even slightly accessible, the Mislitel Pass, leads to a confusing maze of narrow gulleys, passages, switchbacks, and tunnels.

Some Imperial scouts, especially Imperial Orcs, Winterfolk, Urizen, and northern Varushkans, are able to risk a high-altitude approach, pushing over the snow-covered mountain peaks and clambering down sometimes sheer cliffs with rope and piton. The rest are forced to risk treacherous mountain paths, impassable canyons, and thick forests to make their way into the heart of the Mountains of the Moon.

Once access to the territory has actually been achieved, Imperial Scouts quickly discover they are far from the first people to pass over the mountains. There is a thriving community of orcs and humans living in a great valley at the heart of the Mountains of the Moon.

The People of the Mountains of the Moon

The people of the Mountains of the Moon are an uneven mixture of humans and orcs. Orcs dominate - there is perhaps one human for every eight orcs. While orcs are the dominant people here, the population appears quite integrated. Orcs and humans live, work, and play together apparently without any problems. Both dress in clothes that are practical yet colorful - woolen skirts and tunics seem common, dyed in intricate patterns that have enough regularity to suggest they contain some meaning, but what that is is unclear to an outsider.

Small settlements are scattered across the valley, collections of stone huts with thickly-thatched roofs. Each of these villages is built around a larger building that appears to have use as a communal meeting hall. In one of these, late at night, a map of the valley was found by Imperial scouts. According to the map, the inhabitants call their territory "Tsark"; the rest of the place names here derive from the same document.

Each village - especially those in the population centre of Orbotnik - contains step-like terraces cut into the rock, which allow even those based on the steeper parts of the valley to grow a selection of crops and keep a small number of woolen animals. It seems, though, that the animals - primarily llama and hardy sheep - are not cultivated for meat but only for their wool and milk. They are not a load-bearing animal - they could perhaps carry the weight of a child, but nothing more - and there is no sign of anything heavier. The people walk when they need to travel, and transport grain and even stone or ore via hand-drawn wagons. The people of the Mountains also seem to keep chickens, but again there is no sign the

birds are cultivated for their meat. In fact it appears very much as if the entire population eschews meat eating altogether - there are no signs of hunting or even fishing taking place anywhere in the valley during the season Imperial scouts are present.

Many of the settlements also have a sunken oval arena cut into the rock, which they call a *vellut*. Several times scouts observe local people playing a sport in these ovals which the locals call "*kabaddi*". The game is very physical, a team endeavour that involves a mixture of wrestling and endurance whose finer details are difficult to make out. The sport appears quite popular; on several occasions it seems the whole village turns out to cheer the competitors on.

It *appears* that most positions of authority are filled with orcs, but it is hard to ascertain if that is because of a cultural restriction on humans or because the orcs here outnumber the humans eight-to-one. People regularly seek advice from individuals called *sages* by the populace – these appear to exclusively be venerable orcs.



Military Forces

The people of the Mountain of the Moon do not appear to maintain an army. There are however *four* fortifications in the territory; only the region of Borenj is not fortified.

These people appear to have little in the way of weaponry or armour. Outside of their fortifications, there are no swords or spears, and no shields. Axes and knives are common, but they are clearly used only as tools. Staves are also common, but again they appear to be used primarily as aids for walking in the often steep sides of the valley. There are agricultural tools which could in theory be repurposed as weapons - but no signs of this happening. The people who garrison the fortifications seem to have a few bows, and here there are signs of shields, one-handed spears, and suits of armour primarily made from matted rushes, but the garrisons seem to largely leave them in their armouries - even while patrolling their walls they do so with little more than stout sticks and woven nets.

Religion

It is very difficult to discover too many details about the religion of these people. What little can be gleaned, however, points to them being very religious but following a faith that has nothing to do with the Way, or any other recognisable religion practiced by people Imperial scouts are familiar with.

When they are not working, many of these people spend a great deal of time meditating – sitting by themselves in comfortable positions with their eyes closed doing nothing but breathing slowly. Occasionally this meditation is accompanied by gentle music or spoken poetry. They also spend time engaging in quiet discussion and conversation in similar settings.

The meeting halls that lie at the heart of every settlement all appear to possess similar auras. Exploration of the halls while the populace are distracted or asleep allows some exploration of one of these auras. Those who venture in feel a disturbing sense of connection to the people around them and indeed to *all* living things. These auras are by no means restricted to the meeting halls – scouts encounter them all over the valley in structures, or surrounding sculptures.

Sometimes a human – and it is always a human – is observed spending time engaging in quiet conversation with one or at most a couple of other people, humans and orcs alike, anointing them with water with a flask. After conversation, the individual – apparently called an *adept* - may dole out a small amount of what appears to be some kind of drug called *zaboravi*. It seems that *zaboravi* use is prevalent throughout the valley and may be related to the Tsark-folk religion.

The folk of the Mountains of the Moon appear to spend much of their spare time when not meditating or at the vellut in the creation of art. Their iconography leans heavily on circles, annuli, and discs – brightly painted or carved circles cover the walls of many buildings and in some cases are even set into the mountain itself.

Another common piece of art is a sculpture is a large free-standing vertical ring or decorated disc of white granite inlaid with mithril, scattered throughout the valley seemingly at random. Examination of some of these rings showed that several of them were surrounded by auras similar to those encountered in the meeting halls. If they have any other magical qualities, it is not clear what they are at this time.



The Valley

Access to the valley that occupies most of the territory is very difficult. A campaign army would need to fight its way through one of the great fortifications to gain access to the interior. From the Imperial side, such an army would need to come through the Mislittel pass from Lustri in Zenith and would need to destroy or conquer the Maze of Zora before they could move into the heartlands of Tsark. Despite the altitude, the valley is surprisingly warm. Hot springs are common, and the central lake appears to be warmed from below.

Regions of the Mountains of the Moon

Naucini

Quality: Hills, Fortified

This hilly region is in the north-west of Tsark, and contains the only viable military route into Imperial territory - the Mislitel Pass is a narrow but viable route to the region of Occursion. However, the pass has been heavily fortified through the construction of the Maze of Zora, a labyrinth of tunnels, cutbacks, false bridges and dead ends, which serves to fortify the region and prevent passage of any army that does not control the Maze through the region. The great Wall of the Luge towers above the north of the region. At its base is the West Rising, an ancient system of platforms, baskets and pulleys by which the inhabitants of the territory pull themselves to Visoko above. As the hills roll down towards Lake Tsark, herds of llamas dot the landscape, tended by small settlements. By far the largest of these settlements is Krug, set around the Disc of the Ogledano.

Borenj

Quality: Hills

Outside of the raised plateau of Visoko, Borenj in the south-west is the most mountainous of the regions of Tsark - and certainly the least populated. The peaks that border the region are jagged and treacherous - it would not be possible to move an army into the territory via this region - and the long, winding road that winds from the hills of Naucini down to the fields of Obrotnik is at places dangerously thin, with a sheer cliff down to the waters of Lake Tsark below. The road is at least wide enough that a competent army with good maps could make their way through the region, however. Although the way is dangerous, it sees heavy use, as the orcs and humans of Tsark travel up to the Grand Vellut Arena - the largest of its kind in the territory. Some who travel are among the brave few who work to move the great chunks of white granite from the Kamen Quarry down the slopes to be carefully lowered into boats and ferried across the lake.

Obrotnik

Quality: Hills, Fortified

Obrotnik is the most habitable part of Tsark, its southernmost region. The land is not flat per se, but cut across the region are the Great Terraces, on which is grown the majority of the territory's food - the rest being prepared from the algae of Lake Tsark. The road down from Borenj splits here into a thousand tributaries, each leading to many small settlements, villages and town, including the scholarly centre of Adept's Wisdom. These roads would be easily passable by an army, were it not for the Sentinel's Watchmen, a network of small fortifications and stone walls built across the terraces, particularly surrounding the Zanaeti Tunnels. The tunnels are of a sufficient size to allow an army passage into and out of the territory to what - by all reckoning - is probably Skouran territory beyond. Indeed, set into the entrance to the tunnels is a distinctive building clad in metal set with jewels - believed to be a Skouran Embassy.



Temna

Quality: Hills, Fortified

Temna is a hilly territory to the north-east of Tsark. Unlike the grassy slopes of Naucini, the slopes here are barren and bare. In a few places, there are terraced gardens as in Obrotnik to the south, with settlements set around them to tend, but they are much less fruitful, and the orcs and humans who make their home here clearly have to work harder to produce food to sustain themselves. Still, they appear to live with the same stoic cheerfulness and considered stillness as the rest of the territory. Indeed, outside of Visoko, this appears to be the region where the most time is dedicated to meditation and contemplation, as exemplified in the wondrous Bisir Meditative Gardens. To the east, the paths that lead upward and into the Zamok Pass - a viable route out of the territory for an army into the west of Axos - are guarded by the great white granite Fengari Gate. The Wall of the Luge towers to the west, and looking across Lake Tsark there are particularly beautiful views of Merak Falls at dawn. The pulleys and platforms of the East Rising allow travel up the wall to the holy ground of Visoko.

Visoko

Quality: Fortified

The region of Visoko sits on a high plateau that towers far above the rest of the territory. The Wall of the Luge - part titanic monument, part great battlements - is built into the steep cliff walls, transforming something hard-to-scale into something nearly impassable. Atop the plateau, the air is quiet and supremely peaceful. There is a sense of calm dignity across the region, where old hermits - overwhelmingly orcs - sit and dispense advice and meditation to those who have made their way up the East and West Rising to this place of enlightenment. Here, the hot springs of the Still Pools are fed by minor tributaries until they become a rushing flow that falls down Merak Falls to Lake Tsark beneath. At the north of the plateau, the mountains grow ever more impassable - indeed, it looks as though any viable route down the mountains to the unknown territory to the north has been resoundingly sabotaged from the Tsarkian side. Not only is it impassable to any army - it is unlikely that even a lone traveller or scouting party could make their way across the peaks to disrupt this place of sanctuary.

Major Features

Lake Tsark and Merak Falls

Lake Tsark is a large lake, formed from the caldera of an extinct volcano. The beautiful Merak Falls cascade down from the Still Pools above, hot and fresh from the springs. Away from the falls, the surface of the lake is covered in a thick layer of blue algae. The algae is toxic unless carefully prepared but, when properly dried, is delicious and nutritious. The algae appears to grow due to extensive mithril deposits in the water, indicating a vein far beneath the water on the lakebed. The water of the lake is panned for a small bounty of mithril, but the true potential of the deposit is untapped. When moonlight catches the lake's surface, the algae and the mithril beneath shine a reflected silver.

Lake Tsark is not itself a region thought it is about the size of one as it is mostly water, save for the mysterious island of Zabor in its centre. It does not count towards overall control of the territory and is certainly impassable by any army - meaning that a force in Naucini could not reach Temna without controlling Visoko and the Wall of the Luge, or by making their way through Berenj and Obrotnik.

Zabor

In the centre of Lake Tsark is an island known as Zabor. Boats to this island are infrequent, and even were it not for the sheer cliffs that surround much of it, the water below is covered in the toxic bloom. Imperial scouts are unable to gain access to the island. It looks pleasant enough but there are humans on the island who are not dressed as Tsarkians including some in what appear to be Urizen robes. They look as if they might be prisoners – they certainly don't seem to be able to leave the island. Zabor also seems to be the place where the drug zaboravi is grown.



Maze of Zora and the Mislitel Pass

The Mislitel Pass is naturally hard to traverse - the route is narrow and winding, and in many places there is a sheer drop only a few metres away. However, it would be possible for an army to make their way over, were it not for the labyrinth that has been built into, across and around the chasms and crags of the pass as it crosses into Tsark proper - the Maze of Zora. Of a design unfamiliar to anything seen in the Empire, the maze is full of pit traps, dead ends, false doors, walls that shift, pathways that weave around one another and back again.

On the top, set into the rock, guardhouses full of orcs and humans wearing the white cloaks of the cuviri staff the walls, resetting traps and moving the walls of the maze itself, so that the way is never the same twice. None of the traps here are especially lethal - they seem designed to turn back the unwary traveller rather than kill them - but short of marching an army through to dismantle the construction or seize it, no force could pass over the Mislitel Pass.

Krug and the Disc of the Ogledano

The town of Krug is set around the circumference of the mirrored Disc of the Ogledano, a surface of polished mithril around half a mile in diameter. The inhabitants - mostly orcs, even more so than the rest of Tsark - are practitioners of Day magic with a scholarly mien, who favour a practice not dissimilar to the Music of the Spheres, but with a choral focus. At the centre of the disc is a truncated pyramid with a glowing light at its peak; this is the heart of a Day regio favoured by Sinokenon. The mage-diplomats of Krug treat often with the mandarins and other heralds who visit Tsark here, the only regio in the territory.

Grand Vellut Arena

Kabbadi is a game that appears to be played across the whole of Tsark, in all the villages and the towns. Two teams are on opposite halves of a small field, and take turns sending a "raider" into the other half. This is to win points by tackling members of the opposing team. Then the raider tries to return to his own half, chanting during the whole raid. It is quite violent, though there appear to be some rules about what is considered civil and uncivil play that are hard to pin down. It is a spiritual experience for the orcs of Tsark - akin to the rush that pit fighting gives the orcs of the Empire - but all are encouraged to participate as a form of catharsis of negative emotions like anger, fear, and so forth.

The Grand Vellut Arena is a particularly large example of its kind, a great work of communal culture. It is one of the few places in the territory where there is simply space for large crowds to gather, and on occasion they do, to watch vellut being played, to see sages and adepts speak when they travel down from Visoko, or to hear those practiced in the choral arts from Krug sing. Orcs and humans, sitting as one, enjoying a common beauty.

Kamen Quarry

The Kamen Quarry is a modest white granite quarry set into the mountains of Borenj. The work here is neat, methodical - first, a new block is cut from a position agreed by all who attend to the rock - then, collective effort moves it from the quarry itself to one of the great slopes that runs, with cut-outs to stop

the rock should it slip or fall, down into the lake below. The block is lowered down the cliffs, over the edge down to a waiting raft, which carries the block across the blue waters of Lake Tsark to the shores of Orbotnik. People from across the territory seem to come to work in the Kamen Quarry and assist.

While the needs for white granite in Tsark do not appear great - fortresses, once built, do not easily become unbuilt – the material is still extensively in building homes and vellut arenas.

Adept's Wisdom

Adept's Wisdom, nestled in the terrace-farms of Orbotnik, is a small town notable for its finely crafted white granite dais, on which workers and ordinary folk of Tsark publicly discuss the finer points of philosophy. When the sages who reside in Visoko descend from the rarefied heights, they seem often to come to this place to relay their advice.



Sentinel's Watchers

Dotted across the terraces of Orbotnik are squat watchtowers. Unlike the rest of the architecture in Tsark, these were clearly built by someone thinking with martial intent. The members of the cuviri - those orcs and humans of Tsark who deal with the security of its borders - who staff them keep arms around, but not in quick readiness - arms of any kind are a rare site in Tsark, in any case. However, the towers are constructed such that they could quickly form a set of lit beacons across the region, allowing rudimentary communication - like a crude form of the Heliopticon of Urizen - and could be used to help the inhabitants block the path of an invading force by collapsing suitable paths and terraces in a coordinated manner.

As the name implies, the architecture of the Watchers is similar to that of the works of the Sentinel that are found in the Empire.

Zanaeti Tunnels and the Skouran Embassy

At the south of Orbotnik is a strange building, clad in metal and jewels. It is odd and clearly foreign to the rest of the territory - although it does resemble in part parts of the Maze of Zora. The dour garb of the exclusively-human figures who inhabit it are a far cry from the brightly-dyed wool of the folk of Tsark. They are Skouran, and this building is their embassy. The Zanaeti Tunnels, whose mouth the building is built beside, are a route into that nation's land, under the mountains to a deephold beyond. Squat metal tubes are built into the tunnel wall, running up to the building. Within, water flows - by some miracle of Skouran ingenuity driven up from whatever aquifer or cistern they are drawn from far below. The water within appears to be stored in barrels, and traded with the Tsark-folk in exchange for large bushels of dried algae.

Bisir Meditative Gardens

The Bisir Gardens are a network of finely-laid mithril pathways linking places where mana flows up through the earth. The flow of mana in the area is increased, and the crystals grow large and bulbous, like strange mushrooms from the earth, larger ones upon smaller ones. Around the paths, there are neat rows of flowers and herbs, and the place has a gentle air. The orcs and humans who tend to the soils and crystals are quiet and reserved.

Fengari Gate and the Zamok Pass

The Zamok Pass is a straight road up and over the east of Tsark in Temna into the westernmost part of Axos. The Fengari Gate itself is a great set of white granite doors which block the path. The doors take hours to open or close - the best part of a day of a team of strong folk working flat-out - and are built into a narrow part of the path with cliffs on either side. Any force wanting to move into or out of the territory would first have to make sure they controlled the Gate.

Wall of the Luge and the East and West Rising

The Wall of the Luge is a massive construction of white granite, set onto the steep volcanic crags and cliffs up to the plateau of Visoko. While it is clearly an effective defence - no army could cross Visoko without conquering the walls - its primary function is as a great work of art. In these towering walls are carved countless faces and statues of human and orc alike, dressed in the distinctive patterned wools - though the patterns are carved in white stone - of the Tsark people.

Those Tsark-folk who scale up or down to Visoko travel by the East and West Rising, a set of precarious baskets, platforms and pulleys set across the wall, allowing the work of carving to continue across its whole face, and allowing passage up and down to those who want it. It is a long way to fall.



The Still Pools and the Ossuary

Around the Still Pools of Visoko, the wisest of Tsark make their counsel. To the extent that there is any seat of power in the territory, it is here. Among the gently-flowing hot spring waters that bubble from the ground beneath, passing over pools and an ossuary filled with ancient bones, quiet conversations are conducted and careful agreements appear to be made on the matter of which village or town will receive the bounty of the quarry or the lake in the season to come.

Game Information

- The map that accompanies this map is in-character and suitable for using with scrying rituals.
- There are four fortifications in the Mountains of the Moon. The **Maze of Zora** (rank three), the **Sentinel's Watchers** (rank two), and the **Fengari Gate** (rank two) each guard a pass into the Mountains of the Moon. It is impossible for a campaign army to enter the Mountains of the Moon without first capturing the region guarded by one of these fortifications. The **Wall of the Luge** (rank four) guards the plateau of Visoko. That region cannot be entered by a campaign army until the fortification is conquered or destroyed
- The **Kame Quarry** is a white granite resource. Scouts estimate that it could produce as much as 26 wains of white granite each season.
- **Lake Zabor** appears to sit over extensive mithril deposits. The people of the Mountains of the Moon appear to sift mithril from the water at a few key points around the side of the lake, providing around five wains of mithril each season. It's impossible to predict how much mithril is under the lake, or how much more could be decanted each season if the process were better organised.
- **Kabaddi** is a real-world contact sport popular in the Indian subcontinent and other surrounding and South Asian countries. We decided to use the real-world name for the sport rather than create a made-up name – you can easily find details of the sport online. The only major difference between the kabaddi played by the people of Tsark and real-world kabaddi is that the orcs and humans of the Mountains of the Moon play in sunken *vellut* rather than on oblong or circular courts.
- The text of this document was written by Wrenna Robson; Daisy Abbott made the map.



The Mountains of the Moon

