

The Liberation of Kaban

Preparation

The liberation of Kaban begins in Ipotavo. On arrival, each Imperial captain is interviewed by the ochre-robed General Dancia in her ornamented armour. Much of her face is concealed behind a carved bone mask. She is young, but confident, and has repeatedly demonstrated a solid grasp of strategy and siege-tactics. The Axou credit her with breaking the Siege, and she is much-loved in Ipotavo.

There was no question she would command the military action to finally drive the Druj from Axos.

General Dancia welcomes those who have fought in Axos before, and carefully evaluates each new Imperial volunteer, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each company. She is matter-of-fact and straightforward where another General might be arrogant or look down on foreign soldiers –although she does express some disappointment that so few Imperial troops have come to aid in the liberation of the western citadel.

The army of the citadel is no longer alone; the south-eastern citadel known as the Towers of Kantor has sent an army of seasoned troops to fight alongside them. They march under their own banners, and it is difficult not to draw a comparison between the battered defenders of Ipotavo and the fresh, undamaged soldiers of Kantor.

Several companies of grim-faced warrior-artificers from southern Skoura march alongside the army of Kantor. They are heavily armoured, and fight with large shields and hammers. Yet they are not really here to fight the Druj directly. The Skouran soldiers are expert siege engineers, and the aid they offer will be key when the final assault against the Druj begins.

Alongside these mortal mercenaries walk mercenaries of a more supernatural ilk. One hundred and forty Grim Legionnaires, bound by boons from the eternal Kaela, reinforce the living troops of the Army of Kantor. They are cold and distant, and have little reason to interact with Imperial captains. Each one is an elite warrior, and gathered together in a band such as this they provide a relentless vanguard to the soldiers of Kantor.

There are also a number of Axou from the other two eastern citadels – Issyk and Maykop – soldiers, magicians and observers. General Dancia barely bothers to conceal her contempt for them, describing them as “sybarites and cowards.”

When the Tunnels of Kaban fell, they sent platitudes rather than aid. When Ipotavo was besieged, they expressed their support but did nothing. Now that the Druj are on the run, and it looks as if the Tunnels might be liberated, they are prepared to offer limited help. She calls them “jackals,” and sneers that they are worried that they might miss the opportunity to loot Kaban. The two armies, the mercenaries, the Imperial troops, the Grim legion and the scattering of independent Axou captains draw up on the plains outside Ipotavo.

The weather is very warm and wet – comparable to the height of Summer in Bregasland. Despite the heat, the Axou wrap themselves from head to foot, often in bulky robes. Most wear ivory or

porcelain masks or half-masks whenever they are in company – the masks are apparently only removed in the presence of close family. Those who wear half-masks wear loose scarves around their faces which can be pulled up to cover the mouth and nose. Western axos, the territory through which the Empire will march, is marshy and dank, and disease is rife.

Indeed, the Druj have made the situation even worse by calling up a terrible curse –one that taints the water with sickness, and causes any wound to fester with potentially fatal consequence. The Axou endure the curse for several weeks as they prepare for the march west and south.

On the morning of the day that the armies will depart, however, the magicians of Axos perform a potent ritual of their own. They tap into some potent wellspring of healing energy, and as the armies begin to march, it begins to rain – a sweet, soft rain that soothes the heat and when it has finished, the Druj curse has gone as well.

This is not the only magic the Axou have called upon. As is now traditional, the army of Ipotavo itself bears a powerful enchantment. While you are attached to the army of Ipotavo, you find it extremely easy to integrate with their odd customs – they have employed a potent magical ritual to let soldiers from very different backgrounds fight together in harmony.

The magicians of Urizen have determined that this is a ritual of the Autumn realm, perhaps of the eightieth magnitude – no minor working but a significant demonstration of Axou *necromantia*. They reassure suspicious newcomers that the ritual is very similar to the Bound By Common Cause ritual used in the Empire – but there are some significant differences.

The power of the magic manifests as partially-seen spectral shapes that whisper advice but vanish if looked at too directly. According to the Axou defenders, these are the ghosts of honoured strategists and commanders called back from beyond death to help the Axou defend their citadel. Special pains are taken to explain to the Highborn captains that these are honoured dead and not dangerous spirits. Their advice helps strangers fit in, and they advise General Dancia how best to employ her elite forces in defence of the citadel.

While most of the ritual *necromantia* serve in a support role, they also offer ritual support to the Imperial captains helping protect the city – any captain who wishes can receive an enchantment from them without charge. The most common rituals are a ritual that asks a ghost to help guide a warrior's weapon to strike crippling or fatal blows; a ritual that binds a warrior's metal armour to the stones and spirits of the citadel to make it harder to damage; and a ritual that allows several warriors to fight together with additional skill as long as they are prepared to listen to the advice of ghostly voices. All these enchantments are created through the invocation of ghostly spirits.

Campaign

Half the Druj forces have already fled north back into the Mallum – the Axou do not bother to waste time pursuing them. Instead they push straight across-country towards the Tunnels of Kaban. There are several engagements along the way – the Druj have left behind small forces to harry the Axou, obviously expecting to face only the defenders of Ipotavo. The Axos of the Throne of the Day are not at full strength, and it is clear the Druj anticipated that they would be more cautious. They also counted without the assistance of the armies of Kantor.

Both Axou and Druj fight without honour; they encourage their Imperial allies to do whatever it

takes to achieve victory. No quarter is given, nor asked. The fallen are executed, without mercy. The Ipotavans lead the way, launching overwhelming assault after overwhelming assault. The army of Kantor follows close behind, slowed by the many siege engines it has brought with it.

After six weeks of heavy fighting, the liberation force reaches the Tunnels of Kaban.

The Tunnels of Kaban lie along the western borders of Axos. Beyond them lies the Druj Mallum, and beyond *that* lies Therunnin. Several times General Dancia points out that if the Druj territory between Kaban and the Empire was taken from the Druj, the Imperials could march home along the shores of the Feverwater.

Kaban is built between two low peaks, it takes its name from a unique peculiarity in its construction. Perhaps once, long ago, it was just another walled town. Today, though, it resembles an ant hill or termite mound. Every street in Kaban is roofed, and in many cases, the roof of one street serves as the floor of another building or street on a level above. The citadel is a warren, a three-dimensional maze of winding passages and bridges and unexpected open spaces. The citadel was not planned – it grew up organically over the centuries and no living person can claim credibly to know their way around the entire place.

Still, only a portion of the citadel is above the ground. Dug into the sides of the mountains, and extending beneath the settled parts of the citadel, are more tunnels – true tunnels – that serve as catacombs where the dead are interred. Yet the dead are not restricted to the catacombs – from time to time sections of the city become sealed off, and tombs rest alongside homes and businesses throughout the structure.

Kaban has poor sewers, and as a result the place must be a deeply unsanitary place to live. The Axou soldiers tell mocking tales about the night soil guilds who fight tooth-and-nail for the right to transport human leavings from the upper levels to the stinking river that runs through the lowest level (lone since built over) down into the Mallum. Perhaps the Druj invaded, they joke, because they were sick of getting all of Kaban's shit. The Ipotavans do not seem to have a high opinion of their cousins in Kaban.

In a way, it is a fitting place for the Druj to have claimed as their own. They took Kaban by surprise, by all accounts. Elite stealth teams infiltrated its covered streets by stealth, and at the appointed moment threw open the river gates allowing the waiting armies free access to the poorly-defended underbelly of the citadel. Fighting raged for weeks – months – but in the end the Druj were victorious. The Sorcerer-King was cast down, the people thrown into slavery.

The Tunnels of Kaban then served as the staging point for the Druj invasion of Axos. One of the two armies defeated during the breaking of the Siege of Ipotavo has retreated here, and skulks behind the walls. They anticipate a long siege. Imperial soldiers who fought in Holberg know how hard the Druj can be to dislodge from a fortification.

Siege

This is where the forces of Kantor come into their own. Under the watchful eye of Skouran siegemasters, they bombard the walls of Kantor with catapult and trebuchet. They make no immediate effort at first to attack the citadel, nor do they worry about catching the enslaved population of Kaban with their barrage of rock. “They are already dead,” says one Axou officer

cruelly. “If we drive the Druj out they may be given a reprieve, but if we do not they will be slaves or corpses. Better a chance of life than a certainty of death. They would do the same for us.”

For three days the army of Kantor keeps up a relentless barrage against the walls. The Druj sally forth to try and destroy the siege engines, but they are kept at bay by the army of Ipotavo (and it's Imperial allies) over three days of vicious fighting.

On the afternoon of the third day, the siege engines fall silent. While the bulk of the army of Kantor stays behind to protect the siege engines, the forces of Ipotavo press forward to sieze a secondary objective; a settlement an hour's walk from the walls of Kantor. They make short work of the Druj defenders, but it is clear from the orc ferocity that this is no casual objective but possesses real strategic value.

“This is where Kaban stood when He gave orders for the construction of His citadel,” General Dancia confides. “There is a place of power here, sacred to the Tunnels of Kaban. The Druj have defiled it, but our *necromantia* may be able to get it to listen to them.”

The place of power may once have been a temple or a mausoleum, but the Druj have ruined it. A detachment of Axou soldiers set to work cleaning it as best they can, and as the sun sets, the magical working begins.

Three covens of Axou come together, and bind their magic into a single terrible ritual.

There is much discussion; each coven seperately performs a preliminary rite in which they call up the ghosts of departed covenantmates. These ghosts whisper and chant throughout the great work they are about to perform, supporting and empowering their living descendants.

A great chest of crystal mana is brought forth, and the *necromantia* consume philtres and evoke the names of their ancestors as they whip themselves into an ecstatic frenzy.

As the sky becomes fully dark, the ritual proper begins. Perhaps as many as sixty Axos magicians, all masked, their features hidden in dark hooded robes, many of them with staves, splendidly sinister in their magical regalia, draw together a great wellspring of Summer power, focusing and refocusing it again and again.

As the ritual proceeds, a figure forms in the centre of their ritual circle, a half-visible translucent shape larger than an ogre that towers over every human present. It's features are indistinct, but it wears a golden crown and bears a great staff bound in orichalcum.

“It is the ghost of Kaban,” whispers General Dancia, in awe. “They will unleash His Hammer against the Druj!”

With a final exultant chant, the wizards of Axos release all their pent-up energy skyward. The shimmering figure they have summoned follows the magic, like an bolt of golden light launched into the darkness. Many of the *necromantia* collapse then, exhausted. Those who remain on their feet need aid to move, as if all their strength has leapt skyward with their summoned ghost.

The Druj send scouts to the place of power, but they are driven back. The army camps for the night, then rejoins the main force outside the walls of the citadel proper.

Resolution

An hour before sunrise, a star falls on the Tunnels of Kaban.

The noise is indescribable.

The shockwave hurls people off their feet more than a mile away. A pillar of flame and smoke erupts from the place where the Tunnels of Kaban once stood. Debris rains from the sky.

When the smoke has cleared a little, part of the citadel is on fire; a conflagration consuming the Druj and their human prisoners alike. The twisting maze of passages that until recently provided them with protection, become a death trap.

The heart of the citadel is laid bare; and the order is given to attack. There is to be no mercy for the Druj. The armies of Ipotavo and Kantor charge, through the smoke, and engage the Druj who seek to make a desperate, final stand. The fighting rages through the warrens for the rest of the day, and well into the night. It is terrible, claustrophobic work. The remaining citizens of Kaban – tormented, terrified, starving – rise up against their Druj oppressors. As often as not they are cut down by the orcs – but they still serve as a distraction for the defenders, one the attacking force is quick to exploit.

In the end, the Druj army collapses. Some manage to make it through the western river gate, and flee back down toward the Mallum, but the majority are slaughtered.

There is surprisingly little looting – the order has gone down from the Axou generals that anyone stealing from the ruins of Kaban will be executed. They are here as a force of liberation, not as thieves.

It is hard to be sure, but it seems no more than perhaps a fifth of the population has survived the occupation – and the liberation has taken its toll as well. It seems unlikely that Kaban will continue to exist after this, and there are already intimations of political maneuvering among the Axos higher-ups.

Indeed, there seems to be a great deal of concern about what will happen to “the Throne and the Crown” now that half of Kaban has been defiled by the Druj and the rest has been shattered by a fallin star. Who will rebuild it? Who will rule, if no descendant of Kaban can be found to sit on His throne? Who will watch the Mallum if Kaban remains a smoking ruin?

Imperial captains are not invited to involve themselves in these discussions, however. Rather, they are paid a small bounty of crystal mana, promptly and without question, and given sincere thanks for their aid.

It seems unlikely that the Axou will require more Imperial aid in the coming season, at least not in the form of military force. Axos has been roused, now, and will see to its own defence if the Druj are foolish enough to return.

With the campaign effectively done, the politicians and merchants of Issyk, Kantor, and Maykop seek out Imperial captains and attempt to persuade them to take messages back to the Empire – messages speaking of the value of improved relations, trade, and military alliance against the Druj.

If nothing else, apparently, the Sorcerer-Kings of Axos are likely to have a use for a great deal of white granite in the coming year ...

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.

Stories of how your army reached Ipotavo are up to you – the most likely scenario is that you took passage on an Axou or Sarcophan ship from a port in the southern Empire.

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.

You may also wish to review the Axos brief for additional information; use this to create any plausible stories about your time among the Axou.

Finally, you should have a number of additional mana crystals in your pack provided by the grateful Axos. The basic reward is 3 crystal mana, but you may have more if your military unit was sufficiently upgraded.



