

# THE VERTHANDI SPY NETWORK

This season, the Empire has committed a total strength of more than two-thousand force to the spy network in the Otkodov territory of Verthandi, giving an in-depth report on the situation there.

## Overview of Verthandi

Verthandi is a territory in the south of the Thule nation. To the west is Uldur, and to the east is Sküld. It lies to the south of Niddhogir. It shares a border with the Varushkan territories of Miekarova and Volodmartz, although that border is made up entirely of hills and mountain peaks.

Once past the mountains along the southern border, most of the territory consists of chilly plains and tundra interspersed with cold lakes and several rivers. Some of the naturally occurring bodies of water are warmer than those found in the Empire - in some cases they actually bubble and steam at temperatures near boiling. The cold plains are home to a sizable population of mammoths, hunted and in some cases herded by the orc tribes that live here.

Verthandi seems to be quite populous, with many orc settlements. The largest number of settlements are built along the shores of a large, shallow lake in the region of Erskjuvaten. The lake freezes over from early autumn through to mid-spring; it is more often traversed with sleds and skates than with boats.

(OOO Note: You can find details of Askja, Erskjuvaten, Ierkul, Hengill, Erawayugot, Tinfjalla, and Yurah on the main wiki on the Verthandi page).

## Points of Interest

So far Imperial scouts have identified several significant features.

First there is **Lake Dauthötter**, which covers most of the border with Urdur to the west. Imperial scouts have marked small boats traveling both east and west, trading with Urdur, as well as small fleets of fishing boats. The waters of the lake are significantly warmer than might be expected. It seems likely that this great body of water is fed by underground hot springs as well as the cooler waters. Scouts report that the waters "taste funny" - although they seem potable enough. A large seal population that lives in the lake - many of them with white pelts marked with odd red striations - but as the majority of the seals are in Urdur it is hard to say much more about them except that the local hunters seem to give these white seals a wide berth for some reason (while being more than happy to slaughter a group without such a beast among them).

In eastern Askja is an exceedingly peculiar forest - dubbed **the Stone Forest**. At first sight the woodland appears normal. Only when one approaches closer does it become apparent that the trees are dead - and more than dead. They have been petrified - turned to stone by some cataclysmic magical or natural effect. Stretching for several miles, there are numerous hot springs scattered among the trees. While the trees themselves appear dead, the earth itself seems supernaturally fertile. The entire area appears to be a massive herb garden. Perhaps even more interestingly, despite the cold climate the garden appears to produce a significant amount of the delicate herb the Empire knows as Cerulean Mazzarine. The herbs are tended by orc slaves but the scouts who discovered the location recount that they all have one unique feature in common - they are all blind. (OOO Note: This is the equivalent of a large imperial sinecure that produces herbs)

High in the mountains of Tinfjalla are a series of cave mouths that do not appear to lead to mines. The local orc tribe refers to them as the **Houses of Silence**. Earlier Imperial scouts were unable to get too close; this time, it was possible to get a good look at the location, and even explore some of the caves. They appear to be tombs, filled with mummified orc remains, some of them apparently extremely ancient. Many of the orcs had been interred with tomb goods (a rare practice among the resource-hungry Thule), but the caves were extensively protected with traps both mundane and magical. One group reported encountering with dessicated, mummified, unliving guardians that came out of nowhere and inflicted terrifying, crippling wounds. According to the scouts, several of the lower caves also contained mithril runes and mirrors intended to focus magical flows - and orc slaves tasked with harvesting a large amount of crystal mana. What the relationship between the tombs and the mana sites (if any) is hard to say. (OOO Note: Whatever else is going on here, this is the equivalent of a large imperial sinecure that produces crystal mana)

In Hengill, not far from the settlement of Samköma, is a great wooden wheel laid horizontally on a tree-trunk thick axle. The orcs call it the **Wheel of Sighs**. Perhaps thirty feet across, it is slowly turned by dozens of prisoners - primarily orcs but there are unsubstantiated reports of a few humans being present. A cadre of whip-wielding overseers ensure that the slaves keep the wheel turning. It seems to be some sort of punishment device - one scout reported a scene where a blue-clad warlock was escorted to the area, stripped of their finery, and forced to join the slaves toiling at the wheel while another was removed from their shackles, given the very accoutrements her replacement had shed, and escorted away from the area. The wheel turns day and night, without pause. Sometimes, when a slave drops at last from exhaustion, they are dragged away and brutally beaten to death. Other times, they are dragged away and deposited in low stone buildings near the wheel, given a short time to recuperate, before being returned to their onerous task. The scouts also reported something a little odd - what they at first took to be grease lubricating the axle was actually a material being collected by other slaves, and stored in small clay pots under armed guard before being transported north towards Nidhoggir. (OOO Note: It's not clear what is going on here, but something is being produced by the wheel that is valuable to the Thule).

## The Örnhjórfal

On the cold plains of Askja stands the fortress Örnhjórfal. It juts out of the plains without warning, a tall and slender keep of white granite surrounded by high, smooth walls. The tower has an eerie grace to it, quite at odds with the more practical aspect of most Thule architecture. The top of the tower is carved in the shape of a great eagle, clutching a polished weltsilver orb in one talon. The warlock-lord of Örnhjórfal is said to be a favoured initiate of Hinodir of the Bright Orb, one of the Thule Dragons. The structure is built over a "place of power" that allows Hinodir to observe everything that happens in Verthandi - and to visit her wrath on anything that displeases her. In Imperial terms, this appears to be a very powerful day regio, tended by a skilled and well-supplied coven of Thule warlocks that might well be even more dangerous than the fortification itself. (OOO Note: Örnhjórfal is a strength one fortification).

## Feyanksyöthen

This deep mine is found in the mountains of northern Yurah, overlooking the Erawayugot plains. It has only a single entrance - a massive double door forged from an alloy of orichalcum and iron, set in a doorway of white granite surmounted by a massive mithril-inlaid Rune of Wealth. Above the mine opening is an immense carving - a rival to the Face of King Ulmo in Kalpaheim - depicting a great five-headed dragon. The eyes of the carving appear to be enchanted such that they glow brightly after sunset, illuminating the gate with a pitiless silver glow.

A small town lies below the gate, swollen with mineworkers. The mine is believed to delve deep into and beneath the Yurah peaks, and if overheard stories are to be believed it burrows deep into the roots of the mountains in an endless array of tunnels and galleries that have never seen the light of day. There are also stories of massive lightstones, and great weltsilver mirrors, which are used to light the abyssal depths of the mine.

While it produces only a small amount of precious metals, it produces a steady stream of mithril ore. Estimates suggest at least twenty-two wains a season. All the mithril ore is transported north into Niddhoggir by heavily armed and armoured caravans made up of elite Thule soldiers and accompanied by powerful warlocks. (OOO Note: Feyanksyöthen is a prosperous mithril mine).

## Trade and Economics

Verthandi is not rich, compared to an Imperial territory. Much of the population lives in tribal groups, organised and overseen by warlocks in the name of the Dragons. There are a number of farms and mines, but the farms are nowhere near as fertile as those of the Marches, and the mines seem to have quite low production compared to their Imperial equivalents.

Verthandi imports fish and grain from Urdur, and exports meat and metal to the other three territories of Otkodov. Anything of true value (especially mithril and crystal mana) seems to be exported north to some central point, and then trickled back down to the people of Verthandi in line with some incomprehensible plan.

One point of interest is that a number of the farms of Verthandi appear to be *underground*. There are reports of caverns of indeterminate size where Thule slaves work to cultivate and harvest a great profusion of edible mushrooms and fungi. The fungus is processed, and turned into a sweet tasting but ultimately bland foodstuff that seems to be a staple of Thule diet. Some of the fungus is apparently fermented to produce a strong, volatile spirit that tastes disgusting but appears to be extremely alcoholic.

## SECTION ABOUT SLAVES

## The Forces of the Thule

There are five orc armies in Verthandi. Each occupies one or two fortified camps, scattered across the plains and foothills of the territory. Many of their number are engaged in peace-time activities – hunting, farming, patrolling – but the warriors could be recalled at a moments notice to defend Verthandi from invaders.

The **Banner of the Rime Hound** is a large force, familiar to many who fought in the Sermersuaq campaigns of 378YE and 379YE. Beneath banners depicting white dogs, they are notable for the number of warbeasts included in their ranks. Wintermark warriors who fought at the Battle of Ikka's Tears mark the war rhinos, but they also make use of packs of barely domesticated dire wolves, armoured bears of great size, and a unique breed of creature that seems to combine all the worst traits of wolves and bears with the aspect of an ape. They seem mostly engaged in hunting and training new beasts for their army, presumably still working to replenish the creatures slain during their attack on the Silver Peaks. They have an estimated strength in the mid six-thousands. (OOO Note: The Banner of the Rime Hound have the Warbeasts/Monstrous Quality. Imperial scouts are hard pressed to determine precisely what this does, but it seems to allow them to take a powerful attacking order by unleashing their creatures onto a battlefield.)

The **Chasm of Thunder** march beneath dark blue banners often bearing the Runes of Dominion and Strength, Hirmok and Vervys. They are noticeably camped apart from the other armies on the plains of Erawayugot. They seem to spend almost their entire time training – fighting viciously in shallow pits dug out of the ground for that purpose, as well as sending out small warparties to hunt mammoths with hand weapons. They appear to be especially bloodthirsty – after every victory, the victory is daubed with the blood of their opponent. They are at full strength. (OOO Note: The Chasm of Thunder has the Bloodthirsty/Relentless Quality).

The **Claws of the Icy Grasp** appear to have spread out across much of the territory. Their banners show taloned hands or paws, and the rune Pallas is common – and also appears to be a common symbol worn by many of the soldiers. They seem quite disciplined – even spread out as they are they drill regularly in small groups and keep their weapons and armour ready to go at a moments notice. More so than any of the other Thule forces in Verthandi the warriors are engaged in “civilian” work – farming, mining, hunting – and a significant portion of their produce is channelled to stockpiles at **Skjuhalm** in Erskjuvaten. They are at full fighting strength. (OOO Note: The Claws of the Icy Grasp have the Resourceful Quality).

The **Dance of Binding** are primarily camped on the cold hills of Tinfjalla in the south-east. Their banners show a chain motif, and the Tykonus rune. Of note are the number of forges they maintain – there seem to be a number of smiths among them who are engaged in forging weapons and armour. Interestingly, they seem to be using old and damaged weapons – melting them down and reshaping them – more than they are using fresh material. Many of the warriors spend long periods engaged in great rituaistic dances, often fully armoured and wielding their weapons, during which they push themselves to the point of exhaustion and beyond, apparently to strengthen their bodies and their will. They are at full fighting strength. (OOO Note: The Dance of Binding has the Warrior-Mystics/Resilient Quality).

Finally the **White Mountain Fire** are camped in the hills and mountains of Yurah. Their banners unsurprisingly incorporate themes of mountains and fire, and the runes Diras and Sular. They appear especially at home in the hills and mountains – indeed scouts suggest that the entire army is drawn from a single sprawling clan of hill-orcs that dwell in Yurah and Tinfjalla. They are at full fighting strength. (OOO Note: The White Mountain Fire has the Hunters/Guerilla Quality).

## 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.

Where the Army Quality of a Thule army is noted, the first word describes their quality in narrative terms, while the second describes the equivalent quality as it appears on the wiki. So the Dance of Binding are “mystic-warriors” (undertaking ritualistic practices designed to hone their endurance and fortitude), which allows them to take an order equivalent to *Grinding advance*.

