

# The first shot

*"You heard the news?" Brendan asked, the excitement obvious in his voice.*

*"Course I have. We got 18 votes I hear." Dai sighed theatrically and rolled his eyes to emphasize his disappointment. "I'd like to find whoever those two priests were and shake their hands. It's good to know two of them have got their heads screwed on right."*

*"You still reckon it's a mistake then?" Brendan asked.*

*"I dunno." the old guide replied definitely.*

*"You don't know?" Brendan queried, shocked. He'd known Dai for twenty years and in all that time, he'd never known the priest not have an opinion about everything. "You seemed pretty certain before the summit. Why go to all that trouble of sending them your mandate in if you don't know?"*

*"Because I don't know. Look everyone wants to fight the vallorn. We're Navarr, we've all sworn oaths to defeat the vallorn. The question wasn't do you want to fight the vallorn. You can't be Navarr if you don't want to fight the vallorn. The question was whether this is the right time to fight the vallorn. And I don't know the answer to that question."*

*"Everyone voted for it. They must be pretty certain we can do it."*

*Dai Summers hocked and spat in contempt. For a few moments he stood in silence gathering his thoughts. "Look, I've read every word written down in Hacynian. There is no way anyone can know whether this is going to work or not. And that's my point. I don't know. Nobody knows. They say all knowledge is incomplete - but I'd like to have been a lot more certain of*

*victory before we all bet the steading on it."*

*"You don't think we'll win then?" Brendan said, a note of concern in his voice.*

*"We might. I've got hope, same as everyone else does. But hope isn't a Virtue. Hope won't beat the vallorn. We need armies for that. We need allies. We need a lot of things we don't have enough of yet. We'd better find them and quick. We voted with our hearts - well fine - what's done is done. But if we fight with our hearts we lose. And if we lose then everyone loses. If the Empire loses then we lose the Empire. All of it. A fine way to keep our oaths that will be."*

*Brendan pondered that for a moment. It was hard to imagine anything could destroy the Empire, but then he remembered the vallorn destroyed Terunael. "So what do we do?" he asked.*

*Dai Summers grinned at his old friend. "Well we'd better do everything we can to make damn sure we don't lose hadn't we?"*

## **Overview**

- The Navarr have taken the pivotal decision to begin the final battle against the vallorn
- This has significant implications for the nation especially for the stridings

At the Summer Solstice, the Navarr took the pivotal decision to begin the final battle against the vallorn. Following the publication of the research on the vallorn the leaders of the nation were faced with two distinct choices. Either wait for the right opportunity and use the next decade to build up their strength in readiness - or seize the moment and commit the entire nation to war. Link up the vallorn and let the final fight begin.

Arguments raged - there were plenty of Navarr who felt the risk of disaster was simply too great. If the vallorn begin to expand and the Empire doesn't have the strength to stop them, if they aren't in a position to overcome the monsters of the Spring realm, then everything the Navarr nation have worked for since the fall of Terunael will be lost. The centuries walking the trods will all have been for nothing. The Empire will be destroyed, just as Terunael was destroyed all those years ago. Surely they owed it to Navarr and Thorn, to the generations of Navarr that followed them, to do everything possible to build up the Navarr's strength before beginning this final war.

In the end the decision of the Navarr Assembly was overwhelming with the greater majority of priests voting to march to war. After centuries of waiting the nation would grasp the nettle. Thanks to the work done by the vates and their allies, the nation knows what needs to be done. All that is needed is for the scouts to locate the right opportunities to take the fateful steps to begin the last battle.

There can be no going back from such a decision. The Wintermarkers would say that the Navarr have forked their skein, there can be no return from this. But the war will only begin when the the trod network is complete. It seems like there is a lot of work to do first.

## **Going Home**

*We march to war! We send Corey Wayfarer with 200 liao to urge every Navarr to remember the oaths they swore. Let us eradicate the ancient abomination and fulfil our nation's ambition to see the end of the vallorn for good.*

*Corey Wayfarer, Summer Solstice 386YE, Upheld  
(Greater Majority (464-18))*

- All across the Empire Navarr stridings are turning back, and leaving the trods
- More than two thirds of the Navarr stridings plan to give up their wandering and commit themselves to the fight
- The Navarr can now raise three more armies

News of the Navarr Assembly's decision spreads slowly but inexorably across the Empire, as word travels from one Navarr striding to another. The Navarr commitment to walking the trods is a fundamental part of the oath they swear to weaken the vallorn. For centuries the stridings have used the trods to bleed the vallorn, weakening it with each step they take. Now, as the enormity of the decision dawns on people they realise that their long travail is finally at an end. It seems like it is time for the Stridings to return home.

Some return filled with excitement, open to the extraordinary possibilities to come. Some make the journey with trepidation, worried about what will happen next. All are welcomed with open arms, even as the numbers swell beyond anything the steadings can contain. Every wayhouse is packed, every steading has people sleeping on floors. But the steadings too are changing, the idea that after generations spent trying to hold the line against the vallorn, the time has finally come to take the fight to the enemy is electrifying. Many are swept up by the new possibilities that are opening up, and some are even beginning to talk about what may come afterwards... when the vallorn is defeated.

Not every striding chooses to return. Some still have work to do on the trods, letters to deliver, people to visit. Some are unconvinced by the mandate, questioning the Wisdom of it. Better to stick to what is known to work. Others are more cynical, suspecting that those who rush home now will find

they have a long wait before the fighting begins. But the bulk of those who continue to walk the trods do so with new purpose. What the Navarr need now, more than ever, is allies for the war to come. What better way to get them, than to walk the world in search of friends? The idea of acting as ambassadors for the nation, continuing to carry letters and news across the Empire, but using those contacts to drum up support for the nation gives new purpose to many who want to continue walking the trods.

### Stridings End

Any Navarr group that is currently a striding can email us to request to change to a steading after the event is over. In addition any character who is a member of a striding that changes to a steading can take a new resource in Miaren, Hercynia or Brocéliande without paying the normal charge. This reflects the deep-seated changes currently transforming the Navarr nation.

You don't have to change your group if you don't wish to do so! There are still plenty of stridings that are still walking the trods at this time. The number has reduced, but there will always be Navarr characters walking the trods.

Most of those who are returning head for either Miaren, Hercynia, or Therunin. They are taking lodgings in wayhouses and steadings as they wait for orders on where to go to begin preparing for the coming war. As a result of this vast influx of eager recruits, the maximum number of armies the nation can support has doubled to six. The Navarr can now raise up to three additional armies, one in each of these three territories.

People are eager to fight, but they will need equipment and training. Raising an army takes time, and it is not clear yet how much time the Navarr will have, nor how much mithril the Empire will spare. If there is not visible signs of an army being

raised, then those Navarr who are currently waiting to join up, will be forced to make other arrangements. They won't return to walking the trods, at least not yet, but they will find permanent accommodation, look for work and settle down in the steadings. As a result, the Navarr army cap will decrease by one, if they have not begun raising at least one new army by the end of the summit on the Spring Equinox 387YE. The number of armies Navarr can support will continue to decline by one year, for each year after that in which they do not successfully raise a new army (until there is no spare capacity left).

## Preparation

- New Navarr armies must still be mustered, and will need upkeep from the Imperial Treasury

Raising new armies will be difficult - the upkeep of the new armies will have severe implications for the Imperial treasury and there is the small matter of 600 wains of mithril and 225 thrones to be found first. The Navarr will need extensive support, both political and financial from other nations in the Empire to have any hope of raising these armies. Each army will need the approval of the Senate, each will need to be paid for.

Some of the other national assemblies have expressed support for the Navarr, but they may need to raise armies of their own. There is absolutely no possibility of any kind of the Navarr being able to fight the vallorn alone, even if they raised every army they could. Once the trods are joined up, virtually every nation in the Empire is going to be attacked by the vallorn, with a force so powerful that it completely overwhelmed the ancient empire of Terunael. The vallorn has often been seen as a Navarr problem - but that will end - it is going to become everyone's problem.

And not just the Empire, the vallorn in the north, on the border between Otkodov and Varushka will threaten the Thule just as much as it threatens the north. The heart in Liavathen will be a huge problem for the Jotun. The Druj may be able to contain the vallorn heart in the Sarangrave, but the Axou don't remotely have the armies needed to defend themselves against an all-out assault. It is difficult to see how Axos can possibly survive the eruption of the heart in Visokuma, which is reputed to be the largest and most powerful of all the vallorn hearts. Unless something can be done, it will scythe through the citadels like a knife through butter.

Whatever happens, the Navarr will need every soldier they can call on to have even a hope of winning. Hence attention turns to the prospects for raising armies in each of the three Navarr territories where one could now be mustered.

## Hercynia

### **Raise Hercynian Army**

**Commission Type:** Army

**Location:** Hercynia

**Cost:** 200 mithril and 75 thrones

**Special:** Can substitute 40 weltsilver, orichalcum, green iron, tempest jade, beggars lye or iridescent gloaming, for each wain of mithril

**Special:** Additional support from Wintermark or the Imperial Orcs will improve the rate of exchange further.

**Duration:** Two years.

- An army raised in Hercynia will incorporate significant numbers of artisans

- The Navarr could substitute some or all of the mithril using six of the available artisan resources if raised in the next two years

Hercynia is the only Navarr territory that includes substantial mountains containing significant deposits of valuable metals. The forges at Treji were abandoned years ago when the area was over-run by the Thule and countless Navarr artisans were enslaved and taken north to serve the Dragons in Otkodov. With the return of these smiths, the forges are slowly being restored to their former glory and Treji is becoming a hub of activity once more. Any army raised in Hercynia is likely to reflect these long traditions. It will include significant numbers of skilled artisans among the ranks. In addition the presence of so many artisans in the area presents a valuable opportunity.

Treji is just one of a number of centres for skilled artisans in the north. Neighbouring Hahnmark and Skarsind are both home to some of the most skilled smiths in the Empire.

The Ethengraw Black Forge is built to supply an army and could be of invaluable use to the Navarr if their assembly encouraged them to support it.

The Navarr could call on the local artisans in the area, many of whom have small supplies of mithril of their own, to help equip the army. They would need to be paid of course, but the nation could choose to give them significant supplies of weltsilver, orichalcum, green iron, tempest jade, beggar's lye and iridescent gloaming in exchange for the mithril they need. The army will require 200 wains of mithril and 75 thrones, but the Navarr could substitute 40 ingots or measures of the artisan materials mentioned for each wain of mithril. The total amount of resources used would decrease the costs accordingly - so if a total of 80 ingots of green iron, tempest jade, and weltsilver were supplied, then it would need 2 wains



less mithril.

Of course scraping together a lot of resources will not be easy, but it would mean every member of the nation could try to contribute. Acquiring an entire wain of mithril is expensive, but getting a measure of beggars lye is something almost everyone should be able to help with.

If the Navarr got the help of their immediate neighbours, they could replace even more of the much needed mithril with base resources. The Imperial Orcs could use a mandate to ask the Ethengraw to help:

*The Virtuous build up their fellows. We send {named priest} with 10 liao to encourage the Ethengraw to put the Black Forge to work raising a new Navarr army to fight the Vallorn. Let us prepare for war together!*

### **Synod Mandate, Imperial Orc Assembly**

If this mandate is enacted, then Imperial Orc armies will not be able to take the forge hammers order until the new Navarr army is complete. Instead of providing vital support for the Imperial Orc armies, the Ethengraw will use their forges to help the Navarr raise an army in Hercynia. This will help them use their materials more effectively - substituting 1 wain of mithril for each 36 resources provided.

Wintermark could also use a mandate to ask the artisans at Runegrott to help:

*Three tears entwined. We send {named priest} with 10 liao to encourage the artisans of Runegrott to put their skills to work raising a new Navarr army to fight the Vallon. Let us fight together as one.*

### **Synod Mandate, Wintermark Assembly**

If this mandate is enacted, then the Keeper of the Runegrott will not be able to forge new artisan items until the new Navarr army is complete. The artisans who work there would focus all their efforts on producing good quality weapons for the new Navarr army. Like the Black Forge, this would enable the Navarr to use their materials more effectively - substituting 1 wain of mithril for each 36 resources provided.

If both mandates are enacted, the Navarr could substitute resources for mithril at a rate of up to 33 resources for each wain.

## Therunin

### **Raise Therunin Army**

**Commission Type:** Army

**Location:** Therunin

**Cost:** 200 mithril and 75 thrones

**Special:** Can substitute weirwood in place of mithril

**Duration:** Two years.

- An army raised in Therunin will incorporate significant numbers of herbalists
- The Navarr could substitute some or all of the mithril for weirwood if raised in the next two years

Therunin has been invaded by the Druj, but the attackers are already on the back foot, with Imperial armies pushing them back. The territory includes Peakege Stead which is renowned as one of the Empire's premiere locations for the study of herb lore and healing. Any army raised here will include significant

numbers of skilled herbalists in their ranks.

The territory is still home to some Great Forest Orcs, and many more have returned to their traditional homes in Peytaht which borders Therunin. The Navarr have sworn a solemn and binding oath, a terrible geas that would take the very breath from their body and cause their tattoos to twine and bleed if they ever broke it, promising to protect the Great Forest Orcs as if they were family. This has done a great deal to reassure their allies that the Empire will not turn on them, now that they have disposed of the Vendarri and the Montanians.

If the Navarr chose to raise an army in Therunin, they could count on the support of the Great Forest Orcs, who are deeply in their debt. These people are masters of working weirwood. The Empire has seen their skills with growing, harvesting, and shaping the precious wood, but the Navarr's allies are also skilled at making weapons of war with it. Any Navarr army raised in Hercynica in the next two years could draw on the skills and experience of the Great Forest Orcs to substitute weirwood for mithril on a 1:1 basis. The army would be equipped with wooden shields, bow and arrows and spears and would make use of armour fashioned from the tough carapace of the vicious creatures that live in Therunin.

## Miaren

<b>Raise Miaren Army</b>
<b>Commission Type:</b> Army
<b>Location:</b> Miaren
<b>Cost:</b> 200 mithril and 75 thrones
<b>Special:</b> ??
<b>Duration:</b> Two years.

- An army raised in Miaren will incorporate significant numbers of vates

Miaren is the heart of the Navarr nation, the only territory that is clear of the vallorn infestation. With the corruption of the Spring realm gone, the Navarr have created a land of golden woodlands with beautiful glades, open steadings with rich fields all surrounding the beautiful city of Seren. It is a shining example of what all the Navarr territories can become once the vallorn is finally defeated.

There is an almost mystical air to the woods and open spaces of Miaren. The Navarr are careful not to damage any of the Terunael ruins giving the panorama a slightly eerie quality despite its otherwise pastoral beauty. It is also home to many vates and is the location of the the Thorned Rose a school dedicated to teaching vates what it means to use magic responsibly. Any army raised in Miaren is bound to include a large number of vates and other magicians in its ranks.

The presence of so many vates may explain why heralds of various eternal are more often seen her than in other Navarr territories. Five in particular have taken an interest in the Navarr's declaration of war on the vallorn. Each is eager to see this monstrosity defeated, for reasons of their own. The Navarr could ask one of these five to provide assistance and support for the new army.

- Ossegrahn - Lord Rain despises the vallorn for the ruin and destruction it spreads. Though the Cupbearer loathes violence against living beings, they are eager to see the vallorn cleansed from the world. Ossegrahn provides boons of healing and purification which could be invaluable against the vallorn.
- Llofir - The Quiet One is under enmity following a conflict

between the Rotlord and the Highborn. However, he is known to be an implacable enemy of the vallorn and eagerly seeks its end. The Great Fungus provides boons that encourage decomposition, or destroy undead and unliving corpses which could prove useful against the vallornspawn husks.

- Prospero - The Golden Prince's heralds are a rare in Miaren, but they claim that the Prince of Ties takes a special interest in Seren, and considers themselves to be a patron of the city. If such is true, then the claim predates any living mortal's memory. Threadweaver provides boons that bring promote influence and wealth of the kind popular with brokers. It is not clear how this would help against the vallorn, but Golden Spider's heralds claim that the vallorn real enemy is civilisation itself - which is Threadweaver's domain.
- Kaela - The Black Dog is rarely thought of as a natural ally of the Navarr, but the decision to try to end the vallorn once and for all has caught the interest of the Sorrowful One. She rarely offers help proactively, but her heralds have made it clear that the Queen of Silence would look favourably on a request for aid. The Lady of Oblivion offers boons that bring death and a surcease of pain and suffering.
- Arhallogen - The Spider King enjoys a close relationship with the Navarr and has offered aid to them in the past. His heralds are clear that he would do so again, but the Navarr would need to build the fane that Sharp Fangs desires first. The Spider King offers boons that are violent, helping predators to poison and slaughter the the weak. Venom in particular is an invaluable weapon against the vallorn.

To negotiate for the aid of any one of these eternal, the Navarr would have to use a full plenipotentiary, formally asking for the eternal's aid. If that happened, it would be the only matter the eternal would discuss. It would be very unwise to try to obtain

the assistance of more than one eternal with the new army.

## Going Forwards

- The Navarr will need the help of all their allies to complete the trod network
- It will take the combined strength of the Empire to defeat the vallorn
- The Druj, the Thule and the Jotun will all be threatened by the emergence of the vallorn
- The vallorn heart in Visokuma will be far too powerful for the Axou to face alone

To begin the war against the vallorn, the Empire must use the Dance of Navarr and Thorn to complete the network of trods so that they connect all of the six remaining vallorn hearts. The three in the Empire are already connected to the network, as is the heart in Liathaven, and the one in Sküld in the Thule lands. That leaves just two, the heart in the Sarangrave, and the biggest one of them all, in Visokuma in Axos. That means the Navarr "just" have to connect Visokuma and the Sarangrave while ensuring that no territories' trods are lost and the final war will begin.

To link a vallorn heart to the network, the ritual must be performed at a Spring regio in a region that contains the vallorn. That will present some huge challenges that will not be easily overcome. The Navarr will almost certainly need the help of all their allies to link these two territories to the network.

The Sarangrave is under the control of the Druj who are unlikely to cooperate with any attempt to activate the vallorn. The heart is located in the ruined Terunael city Béantal Dol surrounded by wards designed to constrain it. Simply

finding a suitable regio will be a challenge, but an obvious option would be to send a scouting army into the Sarangrave with orders to locate a suitable Spring regio. The Quiet Step would have been perfect for this, but the blessing of Arhallogen came at a price and such things are now beyond them. The only Imperial armies capable of locating a regio in the Sarangrave are the Seventh Wave, the Narwhal's Spear, and the Wolves of War. If either of these armies entered the territory with orders to Gather Intelligence or Seek the Foe and with explicit instruction from the general to locate a Spring regio then the vates are certain it would create an opportunity for the heroes of Anvil to go through the Sentinel Gate to that location (as long as the army was still fighting in the territory of course).

Putting the trods in the Sarangrave may not be enough. The Druj are familiar with them and understand what they are and what they do. Once they realise the danger they present, they are more than likely to attempt to take them down. The Empire will need to find a way to stop them doing that or the whole thing will be for naught.

Visokuma in Axos is even more challenging. Besides the sheer size of this vallorn heart, the Empire does not possess maps that show a clear route to the territory. It might be possible to reach Visokuma from Tsark, Skoura, or the Sarangrave, but there may be Axou territories between the Empire and the vallorn heart. Even if the Empire can find a way to push the trod network into one of those places, then they are still need to find a way to convince the Axou to allow them to reach Visokuma.

Diplomacy is the obvious choice, but it will be difficult. Axos is not on good terms with the Empire, following recent events. In theory they are allies in the Liberty Pact, in practice the small nation continues to nurture a bitter grudge, grousing over the failure of their alliance with the Grendel slavers. Relations are

improving, but slowly.

A bigger problem even than the current poor state of relations is that the Axou would almost certainly be completely overwhelmed by the vallorn if it emerges from Visokuma. The military capacity of the Axou is unknown, but they are believed to have no more than a handful of armies. If the vallorn of Visokuma is connected, and the trod-network completed, then the ambitions of Nikitis Axou, the yearnings toward religious unity, the ancient rivalries of the citadels, a thousand years or more of Axou history - none of this will matter. Without vast military aid, it is likely that Axos would fight a short, bloody, and losing battle against the Vallorn. It is hard to be sure how long it would take, but within a year, maybe two, the people of the citadels would be extinguished.

Given that brutal reality, any diplomatic outreach will be fraught with difficulty. It is clear from Illarch Maxtious's communications, and everything that the civil service has been able to discover from within Axos, that the Axou have no idea about any of this. If they are informed of what will happen, then convincing them to allow it will become impossible. But if the Empire connect the network without telling them, then they will certainly be destroyed. Whatever path is chosen, the ambassador will need to tread it carefully if they have any hope of persuading the Axou to support the effort.

## **Shoulder to Shoulder**

- Two National Assemblies spoke out in clear support of the Navarr decision

At the same time the Navarr were making their fateful decision, the matter of the war against the vallorn was discussed in many other nations and several national assemblies



proposed statements of principle regarding the outcome. Details of these statements and their outcome are found in the The Synod speaks wind of fortune.