

WITH DOOM WE COME

The valiant efforts of the independent captains, who lead their military units in support of the Golden Sun and the Wolves of War, have held the vallorn at bay in Peakedge Song. Drawn away from the Upper Tarn Valley, the spring-infused monsters sought to overwhelm the defenders of the great steading and the treetop sanctuaries, but ultimately they were kept in check. Through dedicated effort, and no small loss of life, the unrelenting force of nature was prevented from spreading into the region. While stopped, it has not withdrawn and the miasma continues to roil and writhe beneath the tree tops. Whatever happens, the vallorn will push forth again in the coming season.

Fortunately, this location offers a chance to erect powerful wards that could significantly reduce the strength of any assault by the vallorn, assuming that the Imperial heroes are able to put them in place before the location is overrun. There are strange standing stones here, that scouts have nicknamed the Thorn Guardians. These warding stones could be used as anchors for warding rituals if the Empire has the magicians to perform them.

There is also a new and growing threat that has been discovered in Peakedge Stead this season. The awakening of the vallorn has seen a migration of ettercaps bursting out from hives in the heart of Sweetglades. Twisted by the fecund vitality of spring, these insectoid horrors have established another nest at the edges of the miasma close to the fallen steading. From inside the strange natural construction all manner of swiftly gestating new creatures are emerging to join the chittering hordes that scabble alongside the shambling spawn of the deceased and overgrown husks. If this nest can be engaged and dealt with it will inflict a serious blow against the vallorn in Therunin this season.

A conjunction of the Sentinel Gate has been identified by the prognosticators and will allow travel to Thorngroves on the Sunday of the equinox.

OBJECTIVE: HOLD BACK THE VALLORN

- **The vallorn can be slowed by creating wards via the Wardens of the Black Waste ritual**
- **Each of the five warding stones can be enchanted only once**
- **Each ward raised will reduce the strength of the vallorn by 1000 for the next season**

The settlements at Peakedge Stead are old, very old in fact; certainly established before the founding of the Empire, and said by some to date back to the fall of Terunael. Whilst Thornsong House has been shrouded by the Navarr, the Druj have burned most of the steading and pulled down vital parts of Stones from Blood. Even so, the barbarians have not destroyed the place utterly. Many structures have either escaped their attention or not drawn their ire enough to warrant the effort of level.

The Thorn Guardians are one such set of edifices that remain, hidden in plain sight among the forest. These five white granite pillars are warding stones, believed to date back to the time when the Navarr people first began to gather and strengthen themselves, preparing for the long war against the vallorn. It has been theorised that the stones were once part of the original defences that protected the first steading in the area. It seems in the past they were used to anchor wards in place, granting the early Navarr a period of respite from the attack of the Vallorn. Nowadays, the Empire has access to much more powerful wards than the Terunael ever created, but there is no reason why the powerful winter ritual Wardens of the Black Waste couldn't be employed here.

The construction of the Thorn Guardians allows them to be used to bear ritual wardings - either Ward of the Black Waste or Wardens of the Black Waste - to hold back the vallorn. When a ward is cast on a warding stone it anchors the magic, removing the normal requirement for a physical building or posts to hold the magic in place. When cast in this way, the wards won't have an immediate dramatic impact on the area, but the magic will grow over time, steadily weakening any vallorn spawn that come in the area.

Each successful casting of Wardens of the Black Wastes on a single warding stone will reduce the strength of the vallorn in Therunin by 1000 over the coming season, to a maximum of 5000 strength if all five stones were enchanted. Unlike the destruction of the ettercap hives, this offers only a temporary reduction; it will only last as long as the magic of the wards remain. With the arrival of the Winter Solstice, the wards will fade and the vallorn will be able to move freely once more. If the Empire can create the rituals on the warding stones, then a similar approach may be possible in the future, creating new strategic options to help in countering the vallorn if it works. As this is part of an opportunity, it is not possible to use ilium to make the effect on the stones permanent.

OBJECTIVE: POISON THE ETTERCAP HIVE

- **There is a large ettercap nest in Thorngroves that could be poisoned to weaken the enemy**
- **The Apothecaries Guild have a chance to discover what poison is needed to destroy the nest on Friday evening**
- **If they cannot identify the right poison, the only alternative would be to pour every possible poison into the nest to see what works**
- **Successfully poisoning the hive will permanently reduce the strength of the current vallornspawn host by two thousand**

An ettercap hive has been located at Thorngroves close to the ruins of Peakedge Stead. The large number of mature ettercap that have been witnessed crawling free of the brood hole suggests this nest is particularly large. Entering the nest is out of the question - the miasma is so thick inside it would kill any human or orc who tried to enter. However, the nests can be destroyed by pouring poison into the feeding hole that the ettercaps use to feed the nest. If the defenders can be driven off and the location of the feeding hole discovered then poison could be poured in to wreak havoc on the larvae within.

The Empire don't yet know what poison is needed, but there is an opportunity for the Apothecaries Guild to uncover that information on the first evening of the summit. If they can identify what poison is needed, that will make this objective much easier to achieve. If they fail, then the only resort would be trial and error, mixing as many poisons as possible and pouring everything down the hole.

This nest is twice the size of the ones located in Sweetglades, and will need twice as much poison as either of those. However, destroying it will be even more effective, permanently removing two thousand force from the effective strength of the current vallornspawn host that is trying to expand in Therunin.

BATTLEFIELD ENVIRONMENT: VALLORN MIASMA

- **A vallorn miasma reaches out through the woodlands at Peakedge Stead**
- **Any creatures - human or orc - that enters the woodland will be affected by the miasma**
- **No player characters will raise as a vallornspawn husk within the timeframe of the battle**

As the vallorn has advanced out from Sweetglades to meet the arrival of the Imperial armies, it has been preceded by a roiling haze of miasma. The spore-filled air will make anyone who encounters it feel feverish or sick, suffering in short time from an envenomed blood. A venture of this scale into the vallorn miasma comes with many risks, especially for those who die of their wounds in its cloying depths. Citizens are reminded that The Gift of Kaela and the winter ritual Surcease of Sorrow can be used ensure that if the worst happens, one's corpse will not be able to rise as a vallornspawn. Likewise, the spring ritual Turns the Circle can be cast upon a fallen citizen to prevent their inevitable reanimation in the hours and days after their death.