

BRAIDED DREAMS

The soldiers of the Navarr, the thorns of Isaella's Dance move no longer, their spears no longer weaving a deadly trace in Druj blood. Their weapons are still, their bodies lie where they fell; pierced by arrows, skewered by blade, hewn by axe, or ravaged by toxins and foul ichors. The army rests silently, but not alone. Alongside them lie the dead and mutilated bodies of hundreds of Great Forest Orcs, foreigners first, then friends and allies at the last. They came to make Eastring their home, before the Druj arrived, and they fought shoulder to shoulder alongside the Navarr to defend it when it was threatened.

All that is left of them now is the memories of their deeds in the minds of those who still draw breath. The bodies should be left to moulder in Therunin, but if nothing is done then they will become offal for scavengers or carrion-eaters. The Navarr usually commit bodies to a simple cairn but there is no chance to do that here, with Therunin under the control of the Druj.

There is a chance for the nation to create a powerful corpse glade, one that spreads its calming touch over the whole of Isaella's Fall. Ensuring that Navarr funeral traditions are respected will help to strengthen the spirits of those who survive. A shared ceremony of remembrance and loss might even bind the Navarr and the Great Forest Orcs allies closer together.

OBJECTIVE: BRAID THE PEOPLES

- **Create a corpse glade at Isaella's Fall to protect the fallen**
- **The rite should draw on the Navarr hearth magics of braiding**
- **The Black Thorns and the Quiet Step will gain five hundred points of supply**
- **Involving the Great Forest Orcs will entwine them closer to the nation**

The thousands of Navarr who gave their lives fighting the Druj in Therunin made the ultimate sacrifice to serve the nation. They did not die alone. The alliance with the Great Forest Orcs is still young, but the Spears of the Pines fought and died together as brothers and sisters, giving everything to defend the homeland the Navarr had shared with them.

The vates know there is power in these acts that is not defined by the limitations of ritual magic. They want to draw on that power to create a corpse-glade at Isaella's Fall to protect the bodies of the fallen from scavengers. The warriors of the Navarr and the Great Forest Orcs sacrificed their lives, creating the chance to braid their souls together in this life and the next. What is needed is a rite, neither ritual nor ceremony but something that reminds every Navarr, living and dead, of the vows they swore to fight together against the Vallorn.

The solemnity can be performed by anyone who is skilled at invoking Navarr hearth magic, but it will help representatives from every part of the nation. By employing the deep magic of braiding, they can build on the shared sacrifice of the Navarr and their allies to bind them together in life and in death. The ceremony can also include marking with a tattoo, the swearing of new oaths, or the simple exchange of food, all powerful ways to bind people together with a shared fate. If the rite is enacted, then the entire area at Isaella's Fall would become a vast corpse-glade, allowing the forest to reclaim the bodies of the dead in peace.

Knowing the bodies of the fallen have been properly cared for will help those Navarr who survived the battle at Isaella's Fall regain their spirits. The army is gone, but there are survivors who will flock to the banners of the Black Thorns and Quiet Step, resupplying each army with 500 experienced soldiers.

If the Navarr chose to include the Great Forest Orcs in the observance, then it may also help to bind their allies closer to them. Just as the first dance of Navarr and Thorn formed the nation it is today, this could guide both the descendants of Navarr and the children of the Great Forest down ever-entwining paths. The power it invokes could turn the recent destruction and death, the burning of the Holt, and the flight from the Black Wind into a pivotal moment that brings both peoples closer together.

OBJECTIVE: RECOVER THE BARROW AXE

- **The Barrow Axe, the regalia of the champion of the Iron Helms, was lost here when the army was slain**
- **The Axe is somewhere in the area or carried by one of the Druj**
- **The weapon could help Varushka to bargain for aid with one of the sovereigns of the iron north**

The Iron Helms enjoyed a dark reputation for bloodshed that might turn the stomach. Stories are told of Hunger, the artefact axe wielded by a champion of the Iron Helms since their founding. The relic weapon is held by the Malinov family of Karsk, who flatly refused to return it when the army was reforged.

When the army was raised anew, the army's artisans pooled their resources to create a replacement, the Barrow Axe, a new ironic symbol for the Iron Helms. This Ironbound Axe, has been re-enchanted each year and presented to a soldier who had proved themselves in a brutal fight of contenders clad head-to-toe in armour but armed only with steel-shod fists. Asked if this brutal fight could be replaced with a more civilised selection, the answer was always "not if you want us to win". With each reforging the Barrow Axe' has slowly begun to accumulate a reputation as dark as the artefact it replaced.

If the weapon can be recovered, it would be a powerful bargaining tool for the nation. Most of the sovereigns of Varushka would be eager to acquire such a brutal weapon. The Iron Helms are gone now and they will not return in this age, but the axe could be used to bargain in exchange for support for a new army. Should the blood-stained hewer be recovered, it will be down to the nation to decide who to petition and what to demand in return for this blood-soaked gift.

BATTLEFIELD THREAT: THE MIRK LIZARDS

- **The Druj are joined by a group of human warriors clothed in scraps of tattered blue fabric**
- **They appear to be excommunicating rather than executing their victims in some circumstances**

A band of human warriors march with the Druj into battle. Wearing tattered scraps of blue tunics, they have the demeanour of grim-faced and seasoned mercenaries, well-armoured and carrying an assortment of weapons. Next to nothing is known of them, but there are rumours that these warriors are driven to oppose the Way in some fashion. There are claims that priests among them have excommunicated foes on the battlefield, rather than executing them as the orcs might do. There is no known reason for their actions, or why the Druj allow it; so the war scouts urge caution. Killing them will put an end to their plans and stop their support for the orcs of the Mallum, but if more can be found out, it could prove useful in time to come.