

A SACKFUL OF POISON

The Druj stormed into the verdant rainforests of Lustri this season as a rushing wave, smashing aside the Stork's Gaze, and securing the Crimson Descent paths down into the Sarangrave. Despite the valiant efforts of the scattered citadels and bands of roving sentinels, the Urizeni have been pushed back before the might of the orc armies. But the resolution of the people of Zenith is still strong, the barbarians have made little progress beyond Lustri; a few patrols push into Occursion and Proceris to test the defenders, but they come to little.

Shortly before the solstice a new vanguard push out into Proceris. A sizeable force of arkad fighters ready for slaughter march in tight formation through the forests, accompanied by a dozens of spiteful tortured souls. With them are a small number of Spring heralds, emissaries of the Spider King and the Green Mother. The latter group are dragging a strange object with them. An opportunity exists to use the Sentinel Gate to reach the Plantation of Tall Ferns on the Sunday of the solstice and intercept the barbarian force.

OBJECTIVE: STOP THE VERDANT TENDERS

- **Intercept the heralds and the huge egg larval egg sac they carry**
- **Either destroy the sac or poison it as secretly as possible before leaving it to be collected**
- **If the poisoned sac is placed into the marshes of Proceris it will wipe out the infestation in the waters**

The Verdant Tenders are servants of the Green Mother accompanying the Druj on their way towards the marshes of Proceris. Several orcs are moving what is believed to be some form of giant bulbous sac, filled with thousands of writhing larval eggs. Its origins are unclear but it presumably the spawn of some terrible monstrosity of the Spring realm. They are carrying the sac to the dank waters that lie throughout the great valley in Proceris.

This isn't the first time the barbarians of the east have tainted the lands of the Empire through unusual means. The woods and meadows of Reikos, Ossium, and The Barrens have all seen the orcs pollute that which they capture or realise they cannot hold. Six and a half years ago they spilled the blood of a monstrous beast to befoul the floodwaters from the Golden Cascade; three years ago they cast the eggs of a Mallum mollusc into the waters. Now they seem intent on continuing this war of attrition on Zenith with a sudden rush to the marshes.

Reports say the larval egg sac contains thousands of embryonic creatures bathed in nourishing liquors slowly gestating. An Urizeni researcher studying the octopi found in Proceris has postulated that such spring-enhanced larvae could be a highly nutritious source of sustenance for the young octopi. Given access to this new foodstuff, it is theorised that the small tentacled critters might begin to grow at a faster rate and enter the next stage of their growth cycle. Whilst many citizens in Proceris have adapted to the new fauna of the marshes, the recent accounts from Kroll of the God in the Lake have made the problem seem all the more pressing to deal with.

If heroes of the Empire can seize the rubbery sac, by driving off the heralds of Yaw'nagrah, then there is a short amount of time in which action can be taken. They could destroy the egg sac, which would simply prevent the Druj from carrying out their awful plan. However, information provided by a herald of Wise Rangara suggests another option. With careful preparation, it would be possible to poison the larvae's growth sac, tainting the feast inside. Apothecaries will need to prepare and then administer in sequence; 4 doses of The Black Gate, 4 doses of The Crimson Gate, 4 doses of Python's Hug and finally 4 doses of Watery Grave. With the sac poisoned, the apothecaries and guards could then withdraw, allowing the Verdant Tenders to continue with their previous directions to move the bulbous spawn onwards.

If the Druj succeed in moving the sac to the marshes, then their plans for the region will advance. It's not clear what that will do, but a plague of rapidly growing and hungry octopi attacking residents and animals in the area is the least the Empire could expect. Simply destroying the egg sac would thwart the Druj's plans, but if the sac can be poisoned whilst it is in transit, then the tentacled creatures inhabiting the marshes will be eradicated.

OBJECTIVE: SLAY ORBUBUS' WEEPERS

- **Locate and kill the Tainted Basilisk's main Spring covens**
- **Success will prevent two powerful campaign rituals being cast in the coming days**
- **Killing the cicatrix will undermine Arhallogen's trust in his favourite mortals**

Arhallogen the Spider King, has long favoured the Druj and frequently bestows upon powerful mages boons and enchantments. One such beneficiary of the Centipede King's "gifts" is a spring mage and vicious leader of vikari, the cicatrix known as Orbubus the Weeper. Along with a swarm of arachnoid heralds, their coterie of battle mages, and a coven known as the Webbed Weepers, Orbubus is the senior ritualist serving the general of the Tainted Basilisk. Adept in all manner of powerful rituals and minor personal enchantments, the coven represent a serious threat on the field of battle, and a strategic asset to the army on campaign.

Killing Orbubus and their coven will deny the Tainted Basilisk a coven with a particular set of rituals this coming campaign season. Arhallogen is understood to have favoured the cicatrix with his own defensive enchantment to rival that of Forge the Wooden Fastness already known in Spring lore, as well as a powerful Spring army enchantment that grants an army poisoned weapons allowing them to inflict more casualties. The cicatrix is planning to cast both these rituals, the defensive ritual on Zenith and the offensive enchantment on the Tainted Basilisk. Killing the coven will deny the Druj the benefit of these two rituals in the coming campaign season.

It will also begin to undermine Arhallogen's faith in the capabilities of his favourite mortals. The eternal has been a powerful ally of the Druj for many years. He admires their brutal strategy and encourages their murderous instincts. Killing the cicatrix will make the Spider King question whether the Druj are really the ruthlessly effective predators they claim to be. He won't stop supporting them overnight, but if the the Empire can achieve a string of victories like this, there will come a point where the eternal refuses to give the Druj anymore support.

BATTLEFIELD THREAT: TORTURED SOULS

- **Destroy the monsters created by the Druj**
- **Priests will need support to exorcise these powerful creatures**

The forces of the Druj in Proceris are accompanied by a number of tortured souls. The people of the territory are all too familiar with these lamentable creatures, for many of their spirefolk suffered such fates when the barbarians last came to Zenith. Once again, they will be used to terrorise the populace, confront the most staunch of heroes, and slay the unwary.

Tortured souls are born from a combination of the Druj's apothecary skills and mystic rituals that break an individual's will and turn them into a monster full of wrath and malice towards any they face. They are fearsome foes to face, often still clad in the garb of their former Imperial lives, they are capable of inflicting a grievous curse with blows from their weapons. Whilst it is possible to put down and execute their physical forms, their spiritual presence can quickly return. Exorcists will need to ascertain the strength of the aura that lies on each creature using insight ceremonies, before mustering sufficient power of will, and liao, to dismiss the souls of these tortured beings.