

The long road

Flute inclined his head in respectful greeting to the old ghodi. The orc returned the gesture and then his face broke into a big smile as he strode forwards to clap the herald on the back.

"Good to have you back my old friend! It has been a long, dry year without you. The Kirkja have sent champion after champion to my door. I was forced to send them away. Promise me you bring me better news?"

Flute flashed a grin as the priest pressed a goblet of wine into his hands. "I do have good news Brynta. The clouds have passed and the sun has risen on a new day. My lord stands ready to challenge your people once more."

"Good news! Good news indeed. The jarls have been fretting and gnawing at me, like dogs on a bone, demanding answers. Without the challenge, discipline among our champions frays... The newcomers need a way to prove themselves that doesn't involve fighting each other."

"My lord will give them a way. His first challenge will be a battle, your champions vs the Empire's champions. Each can field companions to a total of ten. There will be rules..."

but no murder. This battle is for honour only."

The old orc pursed his lips as if something disagreed with him. He breathed in... then out... then decided it was better to just come out with it. "The people of the West have rediscovered their honour... but what about the tree-weasels?" he demanded. "They know nothing of honour, they cannot even spell the word."

"Fear not Brynta. Everyone who enters must abide by Forgefather's laws. Those who yield will be spared. They will not cross the Master of Challenges."

Overview

For the past year, Summer magicians who wish to entreat the Iron Duke for a supernatural challenge have been stymied by a conjunction of the stars. Even the eternal himself was unable to overcome the forces that interrupted magic between the mortal and Summer realm. For four summits, there have been no new challengers of the Iron Duke. That changes now.

Now that the conjunction has passed the power of the ritual is restored, albeit not as it was. Whether the changes are a consequence of the conjunction or at the whims of the *Keeper of the Revels* themselves is not known. What is known, is that the heralds of Barien have announced that they are now pleased to present their patron's challenges for the Empire to

consider.

Where before the ritual would require prospective challengers to proclaim their skills to Barien, with the eternal responding with a quest, now it seems that it is the *Knight of the Long Road* that will set the challenge and have their heralds broadcast it to all and sundry. Those who are bold enough to face the contest must find a coven willing to cast Challenge the Iron Duke on them. Barien's challenges will take a variety of forms; there will be contests of martial prowess, there will be contests of wit and skill, all designed to allow challengers to prove themselves in the eyes of the Iron Duke.

As a minimum, successful challengers may choose a single unique item from Barien's armoury as a reward. Crafted in the Dragonforge itself these unique items are worthy of a hero. For special challenges, *Iron-Staff* may also offer additional trophies to those who meet the condition laid down by the summer eternal.

For the Winter Solstice 386YE, the heralds of Barien are pleased to announce two challenges.

Challenge of the Endless Sea

- **This is a challenge of wits and leadership where the challengers will be given command of one of Rhianos'**

exotic ships

- **The challengers must assemble a crew to take part in the challenge with them.**
- **There will be no spectators for this challenge**
- **The contest will consist of commanding a ship of Rhianos with each team member operating a different duty station on the ship. The challenger's objective is to defeat a sea beast of Rhianos within a strict time limit, and without being sunk themselves**
- **Access to the challenge will be via the Hall of Worlds. A herald of Barien will be present at 14:30 to give further instructions. The challenge will take place between 15:00 and 16:00 on the Saturday of the summit**

The Summer realm is a place where all environments can be found, heightened to their absolute zenith in comparison to the mortal realm. While mortals may be more familiar with the titanic mountains of Cathan Canae's domain or the great dark Forest of Arden, the oceans of the Summer realm are just as grand. Stretching from horizon to horizon, seemingly endless and teeming with mysterious islands and terrifying sea beasts alike, this is the home of the eternal Rhianos, regent of all things adventure and opportunity.

The heralds of Rhianos have one such opportunity for the Empire now. One of their heralds, *Latitude*, has been recruited by the Iron Duke to offer a challenge to the sea captains of the Empire, or those that fancy themselves such. Latitude has found a place where the eternal seas cross over into the

mortal world, a chamber known as "Gosgala". Here a patch of ocean studded with small islands, around which prowls their beloved pet "The Adamantilus", a metal skinned squid of bad temperament with razor sharp extendable tentacles. The Iron Duke's offer via Latitude is this; take command of a ship in Gosgala and try to best the Adamantilus in a battle at sea.

In order to do so each challenger will need to assemble a crew of four including themselves, on the instructions of the herald. Depending on the number of challengers it *might* be necessary for multiple challengers to take part in a single run. The heralds of Barien will post details of the challenge in the Hub on Saturday lunch, naming the challengers and indicating how many allies each challenger should recruit.

Each crew member will be given a separate responsibility as explained and provided in writing prior to their turn on the boat, which will involve some combination of giving and following orders while making decisions on how to operate the ship while hunting the Adamantilus. This will include navigating the ship around the archipelago, employing the weapons of the ship and tracking the Adamantilus down. The crew of the ship will be under a strict time limit in order to hunt down the beast, who will be trying to sink the challengers ship in return.

Latitude promises that in the event the challengers ship is sunk they will be returned to the Hall of Worlds alive - but doesn't make any promises about what *state* the challengers might be

in if that happens...

Accessibility

- The challenge will take place in an encounter tent and can be done seated. It will involve a small amount of reading, following instructions and decision-making in a time pressured environment and potentially loud noises and shouting.
- This challenge will involve playing a real time strategy game as part of a team. The rules will be made available in written form to challengers after casting the ritual but prior to the challenge itself starting.

Challenge of the Frayed Pennant

- This is a martial challenge against an opposing group of Jotun and their two challengers
- The Imperial challengers must *collectively* assemble a team of 10 combatants in total
- They must proceed through the gate at 14:45 on the Saturday of the summit to The Emerald Glade, in Southridge, Hahnmark.
- The Keeper of Revels invites people to come and witness the challenge. Up to 80 spectators may attend.
- A herald of Barien will arrive at 14:30 to the sentinel gate

to provide further instruction.

- **This contest will be conducted under the strict rules - death is a possibility but opponents who yield must be spared**
- **The challengers must attempt to capture a pennant from the Jotun and return it to their side, while preventing the Jotun from doing the same. The side that claims the most victories in the time allowed will be the victors**

As the first martial challenge of the new era, the Iron Duke offers a contest of arms between the Empire and the Jotun, who embrace his tests as much as the Empire if not more. Two Jotun champions have already stepped forth to test themselves against the Empire: *Kjellaug Spearbiter* of Kierheim, and *Oddmund Gunnesbarn* of far flung Fjorknae. The Lord of the Crossroads is eager to find Imperial heroes to accept the challenge thrown down by the two Jotun warriors.

The test has clear rules - this is a mock battle with traditional rules for such things. Both sides will be given a menhir to defend in a small patch of woodland. There will be frayed pennant on top of the menhir. Once Barien's heralds indicate the challenge has begun, challengers may attempt to seize their opponents pennant by force and return it to their own menhir. If a group of challengers can claim their rivals pennant and convey it back to their own menhir while their own pennant is there, then they can claim a victory.

As part of the rules, a team may not move their own

pennant, other than to bear it back to their own menhir. Crucially, Barien's heralds are very explicit that while people may perish in the melee, their lord *insists* that any competitor who yields must be spared. Any combatant may yield during a fight and withdraw temporarily to recuperate. The heralds present will ensure that the rules are being observed and honoured. Anyone who executes someone in any of Barien's challenges will suffer the full fury of the *Knight of the Long Road*.

Whichever team manages to claim the enemy pennant the most in the time allotted will be declared the victors. Barien's heralds will allow each of the challengers in the winning team to select a single item from the Dragonforge. An additional prize selected by the heralds will be offered to the champion who scores the most "points" in the bout, regardless of whether they are on the winning side or not.

Finally, Barien expects all the participants to put on a great spectacle to impress the Summer realm and the spectators. To encourage contestants to strive for glory, there will be an additional prize to the individual from either team whose fighting best entertained the crowd in the judgement of the heralds.

Both the Jotun and the Empire must field a team of ten for this challenge. There are two Jotun challengers, they are recruiting allies in readiness. The Imperial challenges must do the same.

For example, if there is one challenger, they will need nine allies - if there are two challengers, they will each need to bring four compatriots each and so on. The heralds of Barien will post details of the challenge in the Hub on Saturday lunch, naming the challengers and indicating how many allies each challenger should recruit.

Anyone who has the ritual cast upon them to take part in this challenge should present themselves alongside their allies at the Sentinel Gate at 14:30 in preparation to proceed through at 14:45 to The Emerald Glade, in Southridge, Hahnmark. Up to 80 spectators may accompany the combatants to witness their success or failure. They must remain at the edge of the combat area and may heal combatants who have yielded and retreated, but may not interfere in any other way.

The Dragonforge

The Keeper of the Revels has been hard at work at the Dragonforge to create prizes for those who challenge the Iron Duke. These trophies have been personally crafted by the Lord of the Crossroads in readiness for these season's challenges, based on enchantments known to Imperial artisans. Each item is named by him and the wielder will find an aura of the summer realm lies over them as a result. Their enchantment will last for a year, but any challenger who wishes to, could find an Imperial artisan to reenchant the item.

Reward	Type	Description
Fulcrum	Mage Armour	A Sunfire Pectoral fit for a leader of heroes.
Steelskin	Heavy Armour	A Knightly Redoubt that steels the wearer's body and spirit.
Molten Rain	One-handed Weapon	A Thundering Mace that strike enemies down with volcanic force.
Breakdown	Polearm	A Blacksmith's Wage forged of magical self-repairing metal.
Precipice	Foci	A Captain's Mask that imbues the wearer with the confidence of youthful vigour.
Celestial Body &	Tool &	A pair of items, a Phial of

Earthly Song

Jewellery

the Sun and a Bondring,
to keep noble champions
going in tough
circumstances.

Apogee

Paraphernalia

The Fields of Glory, fit for
an ambitious coven
leader.

Magisterium, and
2 Draughts of
Great Revelry

Rod

A Tumultuous Gyre that
throws aside the
unworthy, and two tonics
that can cure almost any
ailment.