

Ossium Spy Network

Notes

Apart from the map, this physical report is an out-of-character briefing sheet, rather than an in-character report. We ask players not to share these briefings around until after the event at the earliest. It is intended to be used to create stories about what the characters involved have done this season.

Aided by the Penumbra Watcher, Imperial forces have committed an effective total strength of well over two thousand force to scouting Ossium. This is sufficient to gain an overview of the territory, including the presence of military forces, and determine precise details of armies, fortifications and bourse resources.

The forces scouting the Barrens this season include Alderei the Fair, Branislav Vuk Strascovich, Davinov Egorushkin Karevelov, Nikolai Yaropolk Borislav, Petyr Stanovich, Sketchemi Justicast Mentyevik, Stanislaus Rorik Strascovich, Torski Fengwich, Torvel Jasnaov Sorrowfall, Vasiliy Krenyenko Valeskai Strascovich, Vuk The Wolfeater, and Yarlari "Yolo" Andrei Strascosavich of Varushka; Bertrand, Drake De Coeurdefer, and Lord Romande Remys of Dawn; and Eli of Highguard

Overview

Ossium is the north-western territory of the Mallum. On the borders of Karsk and Holberg, and across the Semmerlak from Weirwater and Semmerholm. A land of dense, twisted forests and dripping marsh it is rich in both natural resources and threats. Only a small portion of the territory is open - the majority of Ossium is shrouded in old, moss bearded trees, pools of stagnant water, and narrow fast-flowing streams. The majority of the population are orcs - primarily subject tribes dominated by the Druj. There are also scattered small groups of humans, primarily former slaves of the Druj or privileged enclaves such as the Ketsov.

The Empire has made some progress in encouraging the orcs to see them as liberators rather than simply more tyrants. Preachers from several Imperial nations have visited the civilian population and introduced them to the idea of the virtues.

Regions of Ossium

Bittershore

Bittershore was the first region of Ossium encountered by the Empire, and also the first one to be conquered. It lies along the eastern banks of the Semmerlak, and one end of the Golden Causeway

is anchored here. The Causeway is quiescent at the moment, but all it would take is a Dawnish witch to open it and the shimmering bridge would stretch back across the lake to Laroc in Semmetholm. Prior to the Imperial invasion, Bittershore was home to the Sand Fisher clan of orcs. The Imperial Senate ceded the region of Misericorde to the Sand Fishers and the entire tribe moved south across the Semmerlak to Holberg. Varushkan settlers have already begun to establish vales on the shores of the lake, taking advantage of the rich fishing opportunities and fertile farmland. As the prosperity of the region increases, the likelihood that Varushka will be able to support another Imperial army increases.

Galath Fields

Along with Bittershore, the Galath Fields represent the only real open ground in Ossium. The soil here is rich, and the damp grasslands are scattered with smaller settlements belonging to native orcs, most of whom are cautiously welcoming of the Imperial presence. There are two larger settlements - the town of Lomaa which sits above the Crawling Depths, and Ketsov, home to the human clan of the same name. As with Bittershore, Galath Fields have proved popular with Varushkan settlers, especially those from wealthy Karov looking to start new vales in the comparative safety of the new territory.

Bonewood

•**Quality:** Forest, Otkodov

The northernmost region of Ossium is the Bonewood, which allegedly takes its name either from the rich profusion of beggarwood trees or from the number of bleached bones that litter the forest, remnants of many historical battles between the Druj and either the Thule or the Varushkans. Even before it was conquered by the Thule, the forest had a dire reputation for being "haunted". The local orcs tell dire tales of shadowy figures that prey on travelers among the ancient pines, leaving blood-drained corpses in their wake. The Thule have not welcomed Imperial scouts into this area. They have been polite but firm, and made it clear that they are not welcome. The pine forests have been lightly mapped; they extend north to the borders of Skuld, and west to the borders of Krevsaty. There is known to be a large weirwood forest here - the Silent Pines - which is now controlled by the Thule.

There is a castle here - *Fljajokep* - controlled by the Thule, that overlooks the Silent Pines. It was finished in a mere six months, the construction supplemented by powerful Autumn magic. It stands at one end of a narrow but well-travelled pathway that extends from the Silent Pines south toward Ketsov, and was used by the Druj to transport shipments of weirwood south into more open ground.

Webwood

Quality: Forest

The Webwood is a dank, almost impenetrable forest with few trails. As its name implies it is home to large numbers of spiders - many of them either very large or very venomous. There is a well-hidden structure in its depths which apparently serves as a temple or lair for orcs dedicated to the service of the eternal Arhallogen. It is not entirely clear if the orcs are really druj or not, or whether they are an example of a tribe that managed to maintain some level of independence despite living in land oppressed by the Druj. The orcs have kept very much to themselves, but there have nonetheless been disappearances reported in the area which is littered with traps and deadfalls that pose a constant threat to travelers and settlers.

The "temple" has been recognised by the Imperial Conclave as being the property of Arhallogen. and Varushkan settlers are discouraged from attempting to establish vales here. This has not stopped the most ambitious or bloody minded from starting to build along the southern and western margins.

Webwood is perhaps the most dangerous and least explored region of Ossium, and there are known to be at least two bands of Druj bandits in the depths who periodically emerge to raid Varushkan settlements, reaching as far afield as the north-western Galath Fields and the northern Echofell.

Echofell

Quality: Forest

The Echofell was the home of the Amber Scorpion clan of the Druj, and the site of the Tower of the Scorpion. The first real engagement of the invasion took place here when Imperial forces besieged the tower during torrential rain. The fortification was ultimately overrun and captured by the Empire - it is now garrisoned by a small force of Varushkans. Posting to the Tower of the Scorpion is seen as a particularly unpalatable one. While most of the Druj have been driven from the area eastward into the Forest of Ulnak, the woods are home to a disturbing number of unpleasant insects and poisonous creatures that seem to enjoy feasting on human blood.

Nearweald

Quality: Forest

One of the last regions of Ossium conquered, Nearweald borders onto Farweald - the northernmost part of the Barrens. The woodlands here are dense, and broken up by maze-like game trails, and overgrown pathways. Most of the Druj who inhabited this area retreated into the Barrens once it was clear Ossium was lost, but as with the Webwood there are still a few small bands living in the depths of the woods who emerge sporadically to raid Varushkan settlements.

A particularly bloody-minded band of settlers from Livardz in Volodmartz have claimed an extensive section of the forest and despite some opposition from the bandits have established a relatively secure vale here named Karantzy from which they are engaging in extensive logging. The timber from the Nearwald is being sold to other settlers, and has proved extremely popular for helping new settlers establish vales across Bittershore and Galath Fields. Boyar Irina Karantzy and her allies are making money hand over fist. Not only from the trees themselves - Nearweald is particularly rich in precious ambergelt that has a particularly vibrant crimson colouration that is already being touted as "blood amber".

Drownbark Forest

•**Qualities:** Forest, Marsh

The last region of Ossium conquered by the Empire, the Drownbark Forest is a stinking marsh covered with moss-shrouded, dripping forest. arushkan settlers have comparatively little experience dealing with the marshy terrain of the Drownbark Forest, and there are no vales established here.

In the depths of Drownbark Forest is the Druj town of **Orieb**, a settlement surrounding a sprawling and labyrinthine Druj palace. From discussions with the local populace, it appears that Orieb was the seat of one of the Druj clans that dominated Ossium - the Bone Serpent clan - ruled with an iron fist by an ancient Buruk Tepel named *Bleakbane*. The Buruk Tepel herself, and her apprentices, have not been accounted for. The town is composed of stinking hovels, populated by a number of freed orc and human slaves, who have thus far cooperated fully with the liberating forces. There only real concentration of Varushkans in the region are centred here - three bands of wagon raiders from Karsk and southern Volodmartz have congregated here, creating a small enclave surrounding the Stinking Market where they sell valuables wrenched not only from the depths of the Drownbark Forest but also from daring raids across the border into Farweald and the Forest of Ulnak.

Scouts also confirm that there is something significantly more dangerous than even Druj bandits in the Drownbark Forest. There is at least one group of horrible unliving servants - tormented souls bound into the tormented corpses of Dawnish knights - in the Drownbark forest. It's not clear if they are part of a larger force, or whether like the tormented souls of Reikos they have broken free of the control of their Druj masters. Regardless, the scouts deliver warnings to settlers in the area to give them a wide berth.

Points of Interest

Miasma Pillars

There is a Druj miasma - an oppressive aura of despair and fear - that hangs over the entire territory. It causes nightmares and impedes efforts to settle the territory. There are believed to be miasma pillars in each of the seven regions. Recent efforts by the Cardinal of Vigilance identified the locations of some of the stones that anchor the miasma in place, and the scouts pouring into the territory this season have located the rest. The remaining pillars in Imperial-held land are in the Scorpion Glades, in Echofell; at Red Lizard Point, in the Drownbark Forest; and at the Fang Tree, in the Webwood. The location of the pillar in Thule-controlled Bonewood is unknown at this time, there is no confirmation if the pillar is active or if the warlocks of Otkadov have already removed it. The miasma is fraying, but it is still thick over the regions whose pillars are still intact.

There is confirmation of conjunctions of the Sentinel Gate leading to the Echofell and the Drownbark Forest this season, but there is no conjunction to the Fang Tree in the Webwood.

Lomaa

A shambolic town on the Galath Fields, built over the Crawling Depths. The civil service has established an office here to help oversee the development of the territory. Many Varushkan settlers come here first, before dispersing across the territory, giving it a frontier feel. A number of merchants from further east are drawn here, making a quick profit selling vital supplies to the Varushkan, and it is also the site of a thriving market where representatives of the newly established vales come to sell their wares to traders intending to return east.

Ketsov

Ketsov is home to the human clan of the same name, an ambitious family who actually prospered under the Druj to an extent. They are the most eager of the Ossium natives to embrace the Varushkan egregore, being descended from settlers who crossed the border from Karsk many years ago. The inhabitants of the town and the surrounding settlements clearly have Varushkan heritage and many seem eager to adopt Varushkan ways. Symbols of the Bone Scorpion, that once adorned the town have been carefully and meticulously erased. In their place people are now putting new banners and paintings, most are variants of the stylised double-headed eagle clutching axes that is a traditional symbol of Varushka.

The Ketsov Trade Exchange was established here shortly before the Summer Solstice 383YE, allowing the Ketsov to trade that same expertise in crafting magic items that made them useful to the Druj to their new Imperial neighbours. A significant portion of the Ketsov are now bonded to the Varushkan egregore.

Crawling Depths

The Depths are a mithril mine under the settlement of Lomaa. When liberated, they were another obvious sign of the corruption of the Druj. The ceilings here are very low, and the passages and galleries unsafe, but the Druj had literally imprisoned families of slaves in the depths who were forced to mine mithril in return for food and other supplies that were passed through the bars of the locked gates that covered the openings into the tunnels. Today, there are former slaves in many parts of the Galath Fields who have a noticeably hunched gait marking them as survivors of the Crawling Depths. The mining families of Moresvah in Karsk are now running the Crawling Depths, but now labourers are well paid and enjoy a somewhat safer working environment. There is still an opportunity to expand the caves, and make them more palatable to Imperial miners - the mine is not yet working at full capacity.

The Silent Pines

The Silent Pines is a large weirwood grove in the central Bonewood. It is controlled by the Thule. The human slaves who were part of the labour force used to maintain and farm the woodlands here were delivered to Kark shortly after the orcs of Otkodov cemented their hold here. Many of the inhabitants of the Galath Fields and Bittershore claim the Silent Pines are "cursed" in some fashion. Despite this, many structures across Ossium were clearly crafted from weirwood taken from the groves - the timber is very dark and the Druj often polished and varnished it in such a way to call out the patterns hidden in the wood in a way that is both attractive and somewhat unsettling.

The Field of Glory

This ironic name is given to the site of one of the first significant engagements between the Imperial forces and the Druj. Some twenty thousand human and orc farmers and fishers who had fled the invading force were coralled by the Druj, given makeshift weapons and driven to engage Imperial forces. The result was a bloodbath, with barely a handful of Imperials injured or slain and thousands of farmers or fisherfolk wounded and killed. The battlefield has since been discovered to be rich in marrowort, although some reports suggest the area is now haunted by the ghosts of terrified and angry orcs and humans caught between the malice of the Druj and the zeal of the Imperial armies.

The Palace of Orieb

The sprawling, partially flooded palace of Orieb is believed to have been home to the Buruk Tepel of the Bone Serpent clan. It has been abandoned, but the maze-like structure has still only been partially mapped. It is a peculiar and somewhat unsettling combination of living area, apothecary workshop, palace, political hub, and herb garden with plants growing inside the structure in

internal gardens - some open to the elements and others roofed with glass or cunning wooden shutters that can be adjusted to control the amount of rain and sun that reaches them.

Marshstand Skerry

Standing in the Drownbark Forest, the Marshstand Skerry is a low rock that allegedly used to be tended by a ghulai of the Bone Serpent. It has apparently been abandoned since the territory was first invaded - allegedly since before the Webwood fell. The rock is surrounded by decades or perhaps even centuries worth of bones from creatures - some of them clearly humans or orcs - drowned or interred in the marshy waters to rot. The place has a poor reputation - it is both considered to be haunted and also known to be home to especially large, viciously bloodthirsty insects similar to mosquitos.

Fortifications

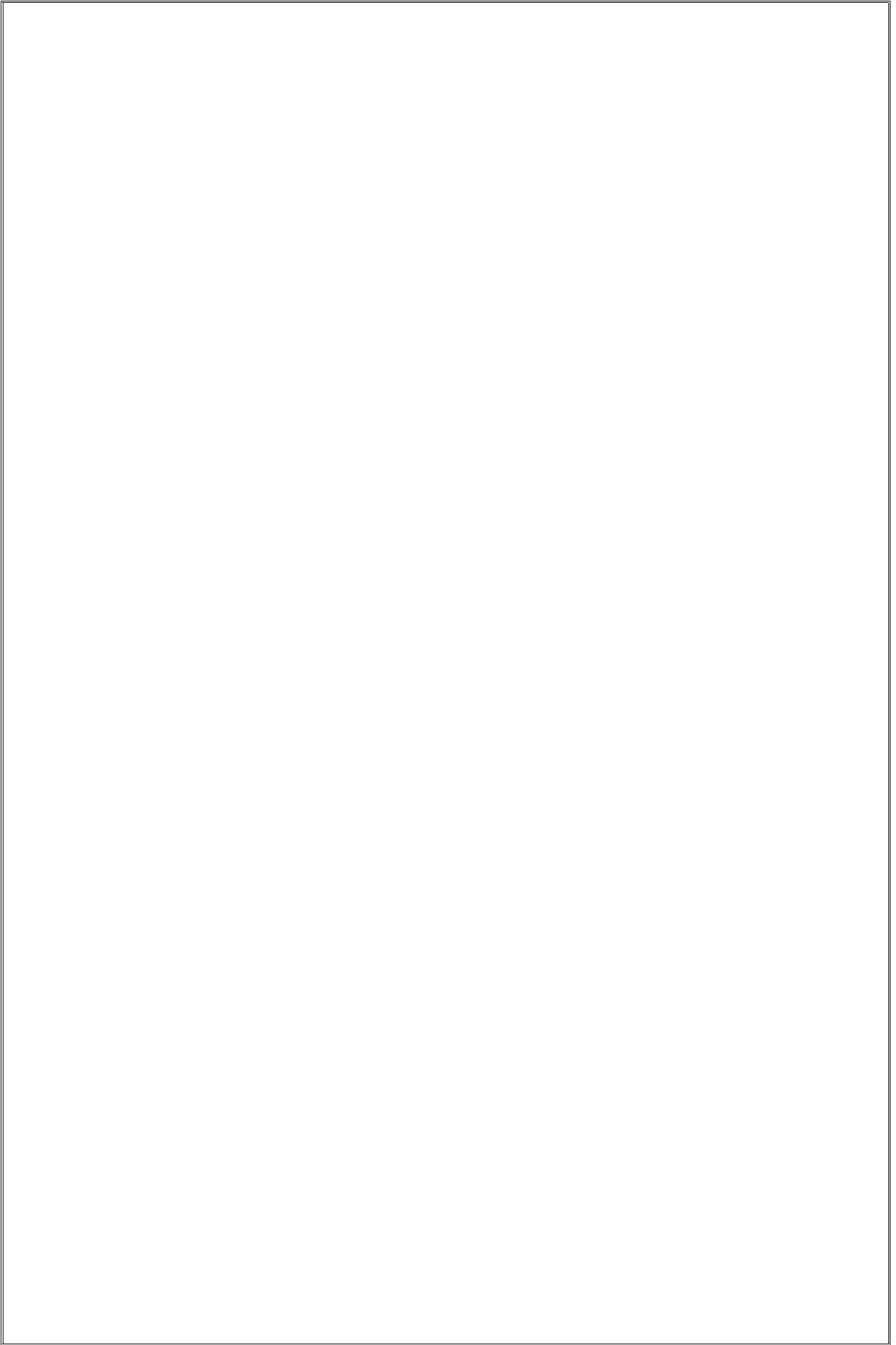
There are two fortifications in Ossium - the Tower of the Scorpion in Echofell is controlled by the Empire, and the Fljajokep in the Bonewood controlled by the Thule. The Temple of Arhallogen in the webwood is certainly a significant structure but it does not count as a fortification.

Trade Routes and Economy

More Imperial trade currently passes west into Karsk. There are very few actual roads in the territory, although thanks to the Navarr there are a number of newly minted trods. The Thule have apparently been working to clear a road linking their fotress and the Silent Pines to their own territory - but they have chosen to cut east and west to connect with their holdings in Krevsaty rather than forge north through the depths of the Bonewood into Skuld.

Many Varushkans are a little unhappy that there are not better roads - the lack of a road building initiative is likely to slow down the exploitation of the rich woodlands. An obvious alternative for increasing the prosperity of the territory would be to construct a port in Bittershore, now that the Sand Fishers have relocated, allowing for trade with Dawn and the western territories of Varushka.

In addition to the Crawling Depths and the Silent Pines, the territory is actually remarkably rich in raw materials. The forests are full of beggarwood and ambergelt with extensive deposits of dragonbone reported in the Drownbark Forest. The Galath Fields and the inland portions of Bittershore are composed of rich, fertile soil that is already producing fine harvests for Varushkan settlers. There are almost no mines in the territory, however, and it seems the best locations for establishing mana sites are buried in the depths of the forests in out-of-the-way areas that in some cases are still controled by orc bandits.



KARSK



THE BARRENS