

ON THE NATURE OF
THE VALLORN

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To all Imperial citizens, let it be known that when someone falls in the Vallorn miasma, they do not die. The terrible Vallorn keeps them on the brink of death and puppets their bodies, trapping their souls, unable to move on to the Labyrinth or cross the Abyss.

The Navarr National Assembly now considers the destruction of the Vallorn and release of the souls trapped within to be the most important spiritual endeavour of the Empire. We call upon our fellow nations to dedicate themselves to this cause.

Raewyn Eternal, Passed by Greater Majority through the Navarr National Assembly in Winter 381YE

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AN INTRODUCTION:

THE THORNY ISSUE OF THE VALLORN

The Vallorn is a wide spanning threat to the entire Empire and the lands beyond our borders. It is a geographical feature and like any wood or marshland can hold dangerous wildlife. It can spread or be cut back with time and considerable effort. Unlike other geographical features however it is infused with Spring magic making the creatures and plants within far deadlier.

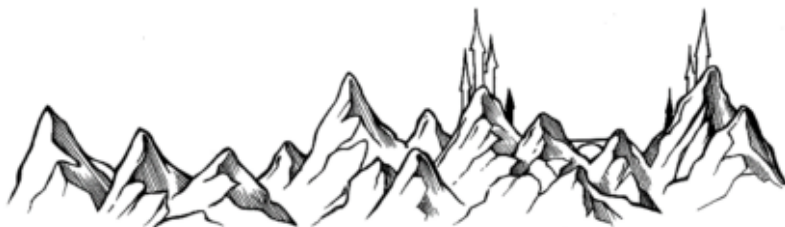
Owing to the nature of Spring magic creatures within a Vallorn are far bigger and more vicious. Plants within the area produce spores and dust known as a *Vallorn miasma*, this miasma corrupts plantlife, animals and people who enter into it. It is deadly and any who fall within a Vallorn risk their bodies becoming puppeted by writhing vines, kept on the verge of life and death, their soul trapped.

The creatures of the Vallorn are known as *vallornspawn* and are known to be remarkably resilient, as it is the way of Spring magic to heal and to endure.

There are eight Vallorn sites, four within the Empire, three in foreign and barbarian lands and the final one once rested in the heart of Miaren until it was defeated. Each of these eight Vallorn marks the site of an ancient Terunael city where the phenomena began.

In your hands you hold the Researchers Edition of ‘On the Nature of The Vallorn’ The first section of the book focuses on compiled and concise information whilst the latter provides copies of the many documents referenced. It is important to keep and spread copies of important information such as these documents lest they be lost to time and destruction once more.

The compilation of these materials could not have been achieved without the aid of exceptional academics. Where possible I have credited the researchers responsible for the supporting materials in this book but I would also like to thank all scholars who work to uncover the truths of our lost past, especially that relating to Terunael and the Vallorn.



TERUNÆL AND THE GREAT RITUAL: THE VALLORN'S ROOTS

Before the Empire as we know it today several nations rose and fell, but arguably the widest spanning empire was that of Terunael. Functioning somewhat like the League of today the hearts of Terunael were its cities. Unlike the League however the ancient society favoured its magicians with the people of power being of mage families. Every city was ruled by a council. From evidence we have so far it seems these councils were formed of six members – two magisters (great mages), two generals (those who lead through magic and military might) and two artisans (for Terunael seemed to see the creation of magical items as important)

Many facts we have uncovered about the cities tell us of how reliant the society was upon their magics. Emrys, a northern city in cold climates constructed a magical sun to aid in their survival and comfort for example.

While they worked together each city maintained some independence and would engage with the people around them in different ways. The people of one city may find the practices of another as backwards. For example, the people of southern cities found some of the mages of Hacynian (the city that stood where Hercynia is today) learning blood magic from the local Ushkans as barbaric.

We know of eight major cities of the Terunael empire who became instrumental in the creation of the Vallorn. Terrunel which sat in what we know today as Brocéliande, Seren in Miaren, Liath (Liathaven), Emrys in Oktodov, Béantal Dol in Sarangrave (The Mallum), Tharunind (Therunin), Hacynian (Hercynia) and Cavan in Axos.

The Terunael empire was great and achieved many impressive feats, both good and bad. We know that their constructions were grand and impressive, the Axou of today credit the influence of Terunael for how tall their cities are now and that it was from this ancient civilisation that their people learned to build aqueducts. However, the people of Axos and those of Terunael were far from friendly. Terunael invaded the lands of Axos, waged war and eventually claimed lands and took tribute from the Axou by threatening to use their powerful Spring magics to destroy the bodies of the revered ancestors of Axos.

If this was not concerning enough we also know that the great empire of Terunael was built on the backs of slaves. We don't know how extensive their use of slaves was in each city but we know for certain that they were kept and used for a variety of things. Navarr herself was a slave but also educated in the ways of Spring, implying that perhaps slaves were sometimes used as a source of additional power in larger rituals. Or perhaps they were used to cast smaller magics that those of higher station saw as beneath them.

At the height of Terunael many of the empire saw it as not worth their time aiding those of neighbouring nations. When those outside their lands were attacked by barbarian orcs they ignored calls for aid. This and their arrogance may be why they weren't prepared for the number of invaders that they faced when the orcs turned their eyes to the Terunael cities. Barbarians attacked in far larger numbers than they initially expected, hitting the defences of the cities hard. When these attacks struck against the walls of the cities they once again looked to their magic to save them.

Between the eight major cities we know of they coordinated a Great Ritual, also known as the Great Work, something that would destroy their enemies and protect their cities. We do not know the exact wording of this ritual but we do know that ritual magic does not go awry. It can achieve your aims in unexpected ways however and in enacting their ritual all eight cities were overrun with abundant growth that devoured citizen and invader alike. This unwise action was made all the worse as the ritual was made permanent using ilium Terunael seized from Urizen.

It is this permanence that has led to the Vallorn as we know it today. An area that was referred to as a 'super regio' of sorts by the Archmage Rhonwen who was instrumental in the destruction of the Vallorn in Miaren. It is an area of overwhelming Spring magic that has stood since the fall of Terunael.

Not all citizens stayed to help with defending the cities and the ritual(s) that entailed. The people of Terunael had many plans to save themselves. Some sought out their neighbours and turned to them for mercy. The towers and spires of Axos and Urizen in particular saw refugees from both the orcs and the effect of the great ritual. These weren't the only safe havens however, one planned point of evacuation were the waterfalls of Seren, named at this time Sanctuary Falls (later renamed Rhonwen's Fall) and there are documentations of at least one more sanctuary but where this was and whether the refugees made it there is unclear. Some scholars believe it may be located somewhere in the Bay of Catazar.

THE FIRST PLANS TO FIGHT BACK: THE SEEDS OF A NATION

After the fall of Terunael the lands fell into what is known as the time of chaos. The refugees of a once great nation scattered in the hopes of finding safety from the threats of the Vallorn and the barbarian orc tribes. It was at this time that those who opposed The Great Ritual but either lacked the courage to speak up or were not in the position to be listened to reflected on the calamity and how it could be undone.

It was Navarr and her partner Thorn that would be the first to rise up and spearhead a campaign to strike back and reclaim their lands. Navarr had been a slave in Terunael, so despite her skill in the workings of Spring magic she was not listened to. Unsurprisingly she did not seek to rebuild Terunael as it stood but to work towards a better empire for future generations.

An insight into their initial intent to fight back against the Vallorn can be gained by performing the ritual Skein of Years on a stone egg that was crafted by Thorn himself, an item known by many as ‘Thorn’s Legacy’.

“The woman, Navarr, speaks. “Thorn, We need to join the cities again. All eight must be joined.”

“Think upon it for a moment.” The man replies gently. “Are you aware of the consequences, this is why they destroyed the Trods after the casting of the great ritual”

“As always, I welcome your wisdom and counsel. You are right, the ritual should never have been cast.”. She consents and he nods in agreement with her words. “But cast it was. They would not listen and cutting the link between the cities is not the answer. The Orcs have run for their lives, our people are safe, but at what cost. We must deal with what we created”

“Navarr, it is not your Empire.” Thorn warns “They would not listen to someone of your station. You are not to blame”

“I am not to blame, but I am responsible” she replies.

He shakes his head, they've had this argument before "We can use the Trods to bleed out the Spring Magic," he suggests "it will take hundreds of years but we can do it."

"This should not be. If we join the Trods, and awaken all eight, then it can be killed. It will not be easy, but we can destroy it."

"With what armies?" Thorn questions "There are none left. either killed by the Orcs or by whatever was created by the Great Ritual"



"There will be armies, we just have to give our people faith, a purpose to unite behind, to rebuild a new Empire that is strong enough to fight"

He looks down as he paints intricate designs on the stone egg. "I hope this works, how many times must we have this conversation"

"Not many more," she puts her hand on his arm. "Terunael will never be rebuilt, but one day there will be an Empire, governed by Wisdom not by Greed."

The creation of Thorn's Legacy

Vision from Thorn's Legacy, first witnessed by Siân and Bledri Eternal, Spring 380YE

It is with this plan to connect the Vallorn hearts with the trod network that Navarr and Thorn moved forward. Many records state that Navarr was young when she began this undertaking, perhaps in her teens and no more than just past her twentieth year. Despite her years she spoke with great wisdom and conviction wherever she went and quickly drew others to her cause. Alongside Thorn she had other close companions and trusted advisors.

"They were all there. Navarr was the centre of the attention of the crowd but around her were the most loyal of her of her disciples. Thorn, a skilled artificer and skilled tactician. Star, a powerful wizard skilled in the realms of Summer and Spring. Talon, a ferocious fighter who had slain many Orcs and finally

Dusk, a healer and apothecary famed for their cures. My Grandmother told me that Navarr stood and spoke to the crowd, their voice carrying across the clearing so all of them could hear it clearly. I have heard some people say that Navarr's words were so powerful that the wind themselves carried them to each person's ears. I love this story although as a student of the Autumn realm, I could cast such a ritual myself for the same affect."

Pyre Blackroot. Grandson of Nightshade, she who was once Artificer Niryril of Hercyniand

It was this strength of personality that Navarr convinced the people who once dwelled in cities to change their lives to walk the trods and undo the sins of their old society. She preached of the Great Dance, a view the people of her nation uphold to this day. She explained that life is a dance in which all humankind is engaged. Some may lead and some may follow, but the Dance is better for everyone when the dancers have the right partners at the right time and place. People who do not feel 'right' where they are should be encouraged to travel to find a new place in the Great Dance, a chance to find a place they will belong, where their partners will be right for them.

It was at Sanctuary Falls (now Rhonwen's Fall) in what we know as Miaren today that her words became action and a nation was born. It was there that the trod network as we know it today was formed and the first oaths to walk the trods and bring the fight to the Vallorn were sworn. It was Thorn who swore the oath first and it was his words that named 'the Binding of Thorns' the words all Navarri speak to join their nation.

Many stories romanticise the birth of the trod network, describing it as one great act that cost Navarr and Thorn their lives. However more factual accounts dispute this. The ritual itself was never going to be enough, the trods needed to be walked, people to travel those paths needed to be secured in order to make sure the ritual was effective. The text for the ritual confirms this.

"When Terunael was overrun, the orcs came as a great tempest and drove us apart. We could not walk the trods where the orcs sought us out. The coming of other people created its own problems as each sought to claim their own land and would not let us move across it freely. Only with the founding of the Empire were we able to walk the trods safely in numbers, further than ever before, and see in the distance a world where our ancestors' great mistake might finally be erased..."

... While it could be performed in a territory that is not part of the Empire, doing so is of limited use because stridings simply cannot move freely enough in large enough numbers through the territory to bind the new trods into place. More so, without the freedom to move, the freedom to follow the trods where they wind, the trods are without purpose.

The trods could be traced across a territory controlled by an allied power, but only if that power were prepared to allow unrestricted access to large numbers of Navarr. There has been no time when a foreign power was prepared to offer such unfettered access to their lands, and certainly not on the kind of time-scales that would be needed to make newly forged trods effective.”

The Ritual Text of The Dance of Navarr and Thorn

It is with this in mind that we can look to what some scholars refer to as the Great Journey, a great undertaking that Navarr and her disciples embarked upon that likely took a lifetime (perhaps it is this that has led to the tales of ‘the trods costing their lives’)

“It is possible to map the creation of the Trod network and from the records approximate the age of Navarr and therefore judge how long was spent in each place. We also know how which Trods have been created since the formation of the Empire, although there seems to be something about losing the land to the Orcs that means that after thirty years the ritual must be recast.

The records that speak of Navarr being young are from those around Miaren. There are several records of Navarr spending time around the Pool of Silver Clouds, and using their waters to guide herself or to guide others. There are some stories from Varushka from the time that tell of a young woman who could speak words and make the waters show people what she wished. It tells that she used this power to gain the loyalty of others and enlist them to give up their lives and walk in sorrow until they fell. In the Varushkan tales these are cautionary and speak of the woman as if she was a Sovereign, however, it is possible that their stories tell of Navarr and there are large parallels.

The Trods were then formed through Astolat and to Brocéliande. It is likely that this took almost ten years to create those Trods and to make sure that she had enough followers to defend them from the Orcs. It was in Brocéliande that there are stories of a major offensive on the Druj, pushing them back into the Barrens and forming the fortified steading of Carnstead there. Although there

are several reports of the battles that took place in the Barrens, it is thought that Navarr did not go straight to Therunin and instead formed Trods through Reikos to hold Therunin.

From the writings that remain, it implies that Navarr was around the age of forty when she reached Therunin. It is interesting to note that if she was indeed sixteen at the fall of Terunnael, then this journey took her twenty four years. I believe this was the harsh reality of what many people have romanticised. It was a life time's work that involved collecting refugees from Terunnael, fighting Orcs, building fortifications that could be guarded, and moving forwards. It is important to note that in many stories there are tales that the forests would form fortresses to stop the Orc's advances or the trees would attack the Orc armies before Navarr would move into a region.

From reading sources from other nations from around this time, there are many who believed that Navarr knew the secrets of the Vallorn and had the ability to control the forest to do her bidding. Although this is possible, it is not probable. It is more likely that she had several Spring covens who she had taught and they used Spring rituals to create forests or to control the trees.

These rituals are unfortunately lost and do not seem to be in Imperial Lore, but there are many who are cautious about using Spring magic for anything other than its restorative properties that could possibly bring about the creation of a second Vallorn. My personal view is that this is driven by fear rather than understanding, but I can empathise why people may believe this.

It is thought that Navarr and Thorn then returned to Miaren, through Reikos and Casinea making sure that fortified wayhouses were placed upon the way. One of the stories tells that Navarr and Thorn took an old friend back to Miaren, to live their final days near their home. This tale implies credence to two facts, the first is that Navarr was younger than many of her companions, and the second was that she was not from Seren and from somewhere further north, since the stories tell of her wishing that she could one day return home.



The creation of wayhouses was vital in establishing and maintaining the trods.

The next part of the Journey seems to be quicker, although as Navarr was gaining in strength it is likely that more force and more covens were joining to her banner. Trods were created through Upwold, Mitwold, Mournwold and Bregasland. These Trods were the first to fall into disrepair after the offensive of the Jotun, destroyed many of the steadings in these lands and forced the Navarr to forests of Liathaven or Miaren.

It is important to note, that Military victory was difficult outside forested areas. It was the creation of large amounts of fortresses using the power of Spring that seemed to allow Navarr and her covens to protect themselves from the Orcs aggression and where the trods were created after this then there was less protection.

Some stories tell of a large citadel being formed in Reikos to stop Orc aggression, but there is no other mention of this magic and it is unlikely that this was due to the intervention of a powerful Summer mage and an Eternal, maybe King Adamant or Cathan Canae. There are no mentions of any such castle in the lands between Miaren and Liathaven however, and this is the likely reason why those lands were lost.

It is likely that Navarr was in her late forties or maybe early fifties by the time she reached Liathaven. There are many stories of her time here, and especially around the earth trails of Liaven's Dance. What is interesting is there are no stories of her travels past this point, although we can speculate that she may have tried to travel northwards to Hercynia and onwards to Emrys, there are no stories that she ever reached them.

It was at the creation of the Empire that the great creation of the Trod network started, to all the reaches of the Empire. It is important to note that although Navarr is credited with the creation of the Trod network, this does not mean that she cast ever ritual. There are several rituals that were cast well after her death and I hope that if our Empire expands to take new territories then we shall see it cast in those as well."

A Historical Treaties on the life of Navarr, Compiled by Morfran Ravenswatch, 172YE

The final fates of Navarr and Thorn are currently unknown, what we do know is that their legacy lives on today in the people of Navarr, in the extension of the trod network and the plans to join all the Vallorn hearts and finally bring an end to the vile cancer at the heart of our Empire.

THE VALLORN TODAY: THE NATURE OF THE ENEMY

The Vallorn today is a very real and present threat to all of the Empire, it is not only a danger to our lands but to the souls of our citizens.

A Vallorn is a geographical feature, an area of land with particular traits. These traits stem from a strong affiliation to the Spring realm with previous vatescholars naming it a 'super regio' of sorts. Within the Vallorn is a miasma made of spores and dust, this miasma twists creatures and plants within the area making them increasingly dangerous; bigger, deadlier, more venomous.

Larger corrupted creatures within a Vallorn miasma are known as vallornspawn. Vallornspawn not only include the corruption of living creatures but also the bodies of those who have fallen in battle in the area. If an individual takes a grievous amount of damage that would render them terminal and is not removed from the area then the Spring magic will hold them there, on the brink of death, their bodies puppeted by plantlife that will grow through them. Their soul will be trapped, unable to enter the Labyrinth or attempt to cross the Great Abyss.

There are seven active Vallorn sites in the Empire and beyond its borders. Those within or near our lands are in Hercynia, Therunin, Liathaven and Brocéliande. Those in foreign and barbarian lands are in Otkodov, The Mallum and Axos. There was once a Vallorn within Miaren, which through a variety of factors (including a casting of 'Wither the Seed' upon the well populated and defensible territory) was defeated, Navarr's greatest victory to date.



Always exercise caution within a Vallorn Miasma

The Vallorn Miasma

Miasma within the Vallorn is caused by Spring magic affecting the air and the effects of pollen and dust from the corrupted trees and plants. Sometimes the miasma is visible as a green or yellow mist but more often it is hard to see at all. Usually the Vallorn Miasma can cause the same effects to a living creature as a venom and often it will cause Green Lung which is a fatal condition as the miasma attacks the lungs.

Vallornspawn

The most common Vallornspawn are husks. These creatures are what remains of those who have fallen with a grievous wound in a Vallorn Miasma that have been filled by the Vallorn corrupted plants. These creatures are passive when they do not sense any hostile presence and spend time in wet areas or in sunlight, seemingly to nourish the plants inside them. If they sense living creatures (or non-Vallorn touched creatures) they gain a sudden burst of spring energy. This energy means that they will move rapidly towards the living creature and attack it ferociously, trying to find a new host for their plants. Vallorn husks can resist a lot of damage and the plants seem to regrow to bind together flesh whilst on the floor.

A Vallornspawn Hulk is a special type of Vallorn Husk that are created when an Ogre or other large creature is killed in a Miasma. These creatures act just like Vallorn Husks, but due to their large size they are much stronger and can resist the Venom.

A Dryad is the name for a Vallornspawn husk who has taken the body of a Briar. Due to the link Briars have with the Spring Realm they continue to grow bark after they have become husks. These creatures seem to retain a heightened intelligence, or at least instinct, after they fall and can channel their Spring magic to heal other Husks. They are a dangerous foe and depending on their age can grow as large as a Vallornspawn Hulk, becoming what many refer to as an Ent.



The Ettercaps are the creatures that are the majority of the Vallorn. They normally dwell deep within the Vallorn Miasma and are found when venturing towards the heart of the Vallorn. The Ettercaps are generally bug like humanoids that seem to have some rudimentary sentience. Sometimes with claws and sometimes with weapons these creatures travel in packs and will try to overwhelm their opponents. Some of the more intelligent Ettercaps will use magics although these are extremely rare. Generally the Ettercaps will use natural venoms and herbs to support themselves in combat. Often they will use Husks to attack and then strike on force to a single point, They are sometimes accompanied by Dire Spiders.

In more recent seasons there have been reports of more intelligent Ettercaps using better weaponry and tactics. This development is most likely due to the influence of the Spring Eternal known as Yaw'nagrah.

Cultists Within the Vallorn

Over the years there have been reports of cultists meddling with the Vallorn, trying to rouse the spawn within. In recent years these groups have become more active. The most prominent group being the Heirs of Terunael, who with the help of the Green Mother, Yaw'nagrah have successfully stirred the Vallorn in both Liathaven and Broceliande. More worrying is that likeminded groups, such as the "Cabal of the Green Mother" of Varushka, seem to be working alongside them with the intent of empowering all Vallorn sites and the creatures within.

The Trods

Stridings walk the trods to make sure that the Spring energy at the heart of the Vallorn is dispersed, Steadings guard the trods and make sure that they can provide for the Stridings who are performing the ritual. Walking a trod is part of a great ritual, the Spring Magic from the Vallorn is imparted into those walking it and although this gives them great energy so they can walk for longer and further, the major part of the ritual is to disperse the energy. As an analogy, the Vallorn would be lakes of corrupted Spring energy and the trods are irrigation channels that drain the energy away. Walking the trods produces the current that will drain the energy.

If a trod is not walked by a significant number then their power fades and the paths erode. Although these Trods can be remade with the Dance of Navarr and Thorn, areas without the ability to maintain steadings to oversee them they will erode again and it will be unlikely safe enough to allow the ritual Dance of Navarr and Thorn to be cast.

The Grey Pilgrims



It is in the Hearth Magic of Navarr that the ritual of the trods is most effective. The oaths of intent to defeat the Vallorn and traced patterns of the land help strengthen the dispersal of Spring magic. In the wake of the widespread news that the Vallorn traps souls the people of Highguard joined the journey on the trods in significant numbers.

Spurred on by a mandate passed with greater majority through the Highborn National Assembly in Summer 382YE the travellers, named the Grey Pilgrims set out. They walk with their own power and purpose, that of virtuous pilgrimage, to disperse the corrupting Spring magic.

CONTAINMENT TO ERADICATION: BRANCHES OF COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS

As we know from the discussion had by Navarr and Thorn (*see Chapter Three: The First Plans to Fight Back*) to defeat the Vallorn threat for good our best course of action is to join all of the Vallorn sites with the trod network and then strike at them with armies. Of course this is a long term plan that we should be ever aiming towards and in the meantime there are several ways to keep the dangers at bay and protect ourselves.

The first is the maintenance of the trods, keeping the territories they walk through safe and overseen so the Navarri stridings and Grey Pilgrims can walk these paths quickly and freely. This also involves the securing of old territories to extend the network. Liathaven is a prime example of this, while the trods can be repaired without local stridings to walk them and more importantly the steadings to watch them there will be the ever looming threat of expansion of the Vallorn there. We may have push back the Vallorn there but without people in the territory the trods will fray once more.

Another avenue to explore in defeating the Vallorn is the aid of Eternals. It has been proven that a boon from Surut can be especially effective against vallornspawn (and any other nearby vegetation) and Llofir has previously offered his assistance (though he was placed under Enmity before this could be investigated further) The Winter Eternal, Kaela, has also voiced dislike of the existence of the Vallorn as it has no end. In opposition to this is the hand of Yaw'nagrah - she has repeatedly tampered with the Vallorn, creating new and deadlier vallornspawn.

While these paths are of a grander scale there are also precautions that many can take if they are to enter an area of Vallorn or plan to aid people who have travelled through one.

The Miasma

The illness wrought by the Vallorn will pass through your skin and so there is no way outside of magic to fully protect yourself from its effects. This miasma will seep through mouth and nose protection and so covering your face will not stop the infection. However it may make breathing easier and also stop spores entering your lungs directly, potentially slowing infection, which is why the Navarr take the field often with mouth coverings. Given time the miasma will seep in and envenom you anyway. You will need to be prepared. Make

sure that you have anti-venoms to remove the effects where you can but in the miasma they will return. If possible do not engage within the miasma.

Once you have left an area of Vallorn infestation get yourself checked by a physik for Green Lung, it is a fatal condition as the miasma attacks the lungs. It can be cured by drinking an infusion of Bladeroot but in advanced cases Spring magic such as the Blood of the Hydra would be needed to regrow and restore the lungs. It is likely that this needs to be done under surgery since the Vate would need to get to the exposed lungs.

The Day ritual Ascetic Star of Atun can also aid in removing some infections gained from the Vallorn, especially those that manifest in a similar way to venoms.

Fighting Vallornspawn

Vallorn husks are resilient, the plant life that puppets them regenerating quickly so even if a husk is chopped down they will get back up. The main way to combat this effect is to use venomous attacks through blade venoms, magic weapons or battle magic. For the average husk hitting them only once in such a manner will be enough to see them defeated for good.



Dryads also need to be envenomed to disable their ability to regenerate but they will also need to be cut down, their bodies being harder than average husks.

Larger vallornspawn such as hulks and ents are often resistant to venom and must be defeated in battle and their bodies quickly decapitated (and preferably dismembered) to avoid them getting back up. This approach works on husks and dryads as well, however venom is far more efficient.

Ettercaps are to be approached with caution as they hold rudimentary sentience and do not attack as mindlessly as other vallornspawn. They are also known to have regenerative capabilities which need to be overcome.

Aiding Your Allies

Before venturing into a miasma you and your allies should be prepared. You should always be equipped with ways to deal and resist venoms and there are ways to resist the vallorn's taint that should be considered, especially for any briars that enter a Vallorn. Always watch each other's backs and take note of wounds sustained by allies to ensure they are healed swiftly.

Should the worst happen and one of you fall then the body *must* be retrieved for the sake of their soul. If you cannot get the body away from the area the Spring ritual Turns the Circle should be performed to return their body to the earth. If no Spring ritualist is available the grisly task of dismembering the body as you would a felled husk is necessary to try to ensure they do not rise again.

Items That Aid in the Fight

There are several items that are of use in the fight against the Vallorn that people should familiarise themselves with to aid in their battle preparations:



Imperial Roseweald – This herb allows a trained physic to remove the effects of venoms. This is of obvious use in removing the effects of a Vallorn miasma. However, within a miasma you will suffer re-infection.

Bloodharrow Philtre – This is an apothecary potion that you can drink that will have the same effects as Imperial Roseweald administered by a physic. This is a very useful potion to carry with you. This can be recognised as follows - This translucent red liquid has tiny white particles suspended in it. It has a spicy scent, and a tiny amount on your tongue or your finger tingles unpleasantly for a moment.

Maledict's Medicament – This is an apothecary potion that you can drink that removes the effects of venoms mundane and magical as well as effects that will weaken you. It is a deep crimson liquid has a thin layer of scummy froth atop it. It smells unpleasant and has an oily texture. A drop on your tongue

makes you salivate – it is vile and you will feel a strong urge to spit the mixture out.

The Sovereign Specific – This is a wonderful potion that cures all ill effects and as such if you have been injured and envenomed can save your life. It's a clear liquid that seems almost to sparkle when it is shaken or held up to the light. It smells fresh and a little minty. A drop on your tongue will reveal it to have a vibrant, pleasant taste.

Oil of Blackthorn – This oil is a blade venom which you can coat a weapon with. This will allow you to strike down a Vallorn Husk. Note that this dries quickly on the blade and will only stay effective for 10 seconds.

Abraxus Stone – This item has the sole purpose of protection against the Vallorn. When you are healed in any way venom is purged from your body. Additionally, the item makes you immune to the effects of the Vallorn miasma. You can't catch Green Lung and should you fall to the Vallorn you will not rise as a Husk.

Scorpion's Stings & Barbed Spear – These weapons allow those without magic to envenom their enemies.

Singing Stones – While the people of Navarr have only discovered one of these stones its ability to bind multiple covens together to cast anti-Vallorn rituals is priceless.

Rituals of Use in Fighting the Vallorn

The ritualists of the Empire have a few rituals at their disposal for fighting the Vallorn and this number will hopefully grow given all we are learning of this vile threat.

Ascetic Star of Atun – This Day ritual allows a magician to cure venom from potentially a large number of people.

Ward of the Black Waste – This Winter ritual allows you to ward an area against the Vallorn. Any such creature of any size will be weakened within the ward allowing you to cut them down without them getting back up.

The Grave's Treacherous Edge – This Winter ritual allows a magician to envenom all creatures within a large area. Of great use in destroying Vallorn Spawn.

Fetid Breath of Teeming Plague – This Spring ritual does the same as the above Winter Ritual.

Vitality of Rushing Water – This Spring ritual gives its recipient the same protection as an Abraxus Stone.

Turns the Circle – This Spring ritual rapidly decomposes a corpse. This will stop it from being raised as a Vallorn Husk.



The Dance of Navarr and Thorn – The creation of more trods is vital to leeching the Spring magic from the hearts of the Vallorn. We must all endeavour to walk the trods, it fights a great threat but also invigorates any who walk those paths allowing them to walk longer distances in a shorter time.

Wither The Seed and The Arc of Skuld – While placing Winter curses on a territory is highly inadvisable the nature of Winter will slow the progress of the overwhelming Spring magic that is the Vallorn. Wither The Seed and the Thule ritual Arc of Skuld are two means to this end but should be only used in the direst of circumstances.

There is currently no codified way to reverse the effects of Wither The Seed but the people of Navarr are currently working on solutions, especially to combat the blight placed on Broceliande.

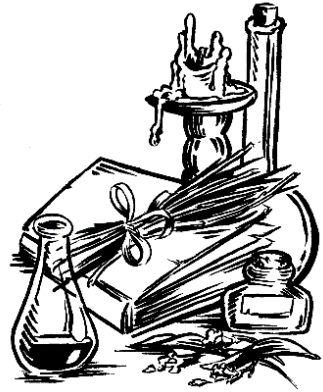
REFERENCE MATERIALS: MORE PAGES TO LEAF THROUGH

The Virtuous apply what they have learned; Widom knows all knowledge is incomplete.

I have referenced many documents, first-hand accounts and ritual findings in the compilation of this book. I wrote them in what I intended to be a clear and concise manner to be accessible to as many people as possible. However, my words do not do justice to the volume of information there is within the Empire and beyond.

As such in this edition of *On the Nature of The Vallorn* I have included as many of these documents as I could. I hope that having this information will help other scholars and researchers further understand Terunael, its fall and the Vallorn itself. Please bear in mind that, as is the way with gathering information from several sources, some of these documents may contradict each other in places or contain weighted bias or misinformation (both intentional and not)

All documents within this section are kept as true to the originals as possible. As such some will contain spelling and grammatical errors. While I considered correcting many of these, I ultimately chose to share them as true to the documents I received to reduce to leave them open to your own interpretation.



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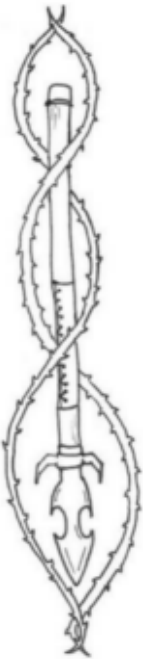
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TERUNAEI AND THE NAVARR: A TIMELINE

Much of the history of Terunael and early Navarr is difficult to date precisely, however Imperial scholars continue to work to uncover the truths of our past. Presented below is a basic timeline of the Navarri people.

TERUNAEI

At its height, the Terunael empire may have lasted for between a hundred and three hundred years. During this period, the orcs were slowly driven out of the heartlands of what is today the Empire. The Terunael traded and warred with other human cultures - Imperial scholars believe that the Suaq, the Kallavesi, the Ushka, the Feni, and the Urizen, or their forebears, were all present in some form or another during this time along with several cultures that no longer exist about whom we have only fragmentary records - such as the Gwerin Morfa. This period ends with the catastrophic Fall, and the creation of the vallorn.



CHAOS

After the fall of Terunael, the lands of the Bay of Catazar descended into chaos. Following the calamity, the barbarian orcs, who had largely been pushed out of the central lands, swept back in. A great many humans were enslaved, or killed, and their continued invasions sped the collapse of whatever infrastructure had survived the Bane of Terunael. Those human cultures who survived were isolated or lived in places the orcs were not interested in - the Suaq and Kallavesa in the north-west, the Ushka in the north-east, and the Urizen in the south-east.

PRE-IMPERIAL

Three waves of colonization brought people that founded new human nations. The Highborn are generally held to be the first, landing in the south, while the forebears of Dawn and The Marches settled in the east. Some scholars suggest that the Steinr and Vard appeared in the north during this period, after the foundation of Highguard, but there is no true consensus one way or another.

When the first waves of human colonization began, most of the initial inhabitants (sometimes called the *People of the North*) were in retreat - the Navarr to their forests, the Urizen to their mountains, the Suaq and the Kallavesi to the inhospitable north, the Ushka huddled around their camp fires, and the Feni lurking in their wilderness. There were also humans living among the orcs, largely as chattel, slaves or subjects. Where these humans were freed from orc oppression, they were usually assimilated by the conquerors leaving no records of their own culture.

These nations grew in size and power through constant warfare with their neighbours, particularly the barbarian orcs who claimed the land as their own. While the nations were successful, life was hard and brutal for the initial settlers and historians believe that it was only a matter of time before these new human nations would have been overrun and subjugated, like their predecessors.

YEAR ZERO

While many scholars disagree on how long passed between the fall of Terunael and the rise of the Empire we know today most evidence seems to support the fact that the Time of Chaos and Pre-Imperial time periods spans centuries (and not thousands of years as some romanticised tales declare)

It is in what is known as Year Zero that with an eye to the conflict between the human nations and the risks posed by the orcs, the First Empress began her crusade in Highguard. She gathered around a small group of like-minded individuals from various nations and with their assistance, and with the aid of the Navarr, she brought together the leaders of humanity to discuss the barbarian threat. Her vision and charisma - and the hard work of her allies - convinced many of them to recognise the value of an Empire. The people of Urizen declined to join, but sufficient folk from The Brass Coast, The League, Dawn, Highguard, Navarr, Varushka, Wintermark and The Marches accepted the proposal to allow them to form the Empire.

(22 YE - 34 YE) Reign of Emperor Giovanni, "the Peacemaker"

After the death of the First Empress, Emperor Giovanni of Tassato was chosen by the Senate to replace her. An advisor to the late Empress, Giovanni was a statesman and politician rather than a military leader like his predecessor. He set about ensuring the Empire had the infrastructure required to help it prosper. His first act was to initiate a tradition of meeting once every three months at the site of the first meeting where the Empire was formed. A Senate building was built on the site, and it was declared Imperial Territory.



(27 YE) Reclamation of Miaren

After fifteen years or so of active preparation, some of which spearheaded by the vate Rhonwen (see later documents on Rhonwen's Fall), the Navarr destroyed the vallorn of Miaren with a combination of military might and potent rituals. The city of Seren was recovered and became a center for investigation of both vallorn and the history of Terunael for the next hundred years.

(36 YE - 69 YE) Reign of Empress Richilde, "the Sun Queen"

(71 YE - 91 YE) Reign of Empress Teleri, "the Pious"

This Navarr Empress was deeply involved in the business of the Synod, and it was during her reign that they first began to exert the political powers they possessed. During her reign, the Synod gained increasing influence over all other parts of Imperial life, especially the Imperial Senate.

(92 YE - 102 YE) The First Interregnum

(103 YE - 120 YE) Reign of Empress Aenea, "the Builder"

(125 YE to 167 YE) Reign of Empress Varkula, called "the Undying"

168 YE to 179 YE Reign of Emperor Frederick, called "the Philosopher"

(180 to 199 YE) Reign of Emperor Barabbas

(200 YE - 209 YE) Reign of Emperor Nicovar "the Mad"

The first reversals in the Empire's fortune occurred during the reign of Emperor Nicovar. Initially a brilliant administrator, Nicovar expanded the role of the civil service in support of the Empire. However, a decade of attempting to micromanage every element of the Empire, as well as a reliance on the magic of Day to gather and interpret ever greater amounts of information, eventually caused him to descend into madness.

The draughir Emperor became increasingly unstable, perceiving patterns in events that appeared paranoid to others. His unpopular policies divided the Senate and the Synod, and there were rumbles of civil war. He began to demand extreme amounts of record keeping and it became clear that he was not in his right mind.

Things came to a head in 209 when Emperor Nicovar sent his troops to burn down the Empire's libraries. There was a revolt, which culminated in the destruction of the central repository of records in Highguard and several key spires in Urizen. The mad emperor was executed by the captain of his own guard, the Navarr Thorn Isaella. Despite appeals for clemency from the Synod, Isaella took full responsibility. She was convicted as a traitor, but at the same time was both lauded as an exemplar of courage and duty, and a hero of the Empire.

The destruction of the libraries left a big hole in the history of the Empire - thousands of books and scrolls were lost. While records still existed, there were many gaps and those that remained were fragmentary. Since then scholars have attempted to recreate the books and records they had lost, but with mixed success.

(212 YE - 234 YE) Reign of Empress Mariika

(239 YE - 248 YE) Reign of Emperor Guntherm

(249 YE - 257 YE) Reign of Empress Brannan

The Navarri Empress Brannan followed Guntherm to the Throne, and was another military-minded ruler dedicated to smashing the orcs and expanding the borders of the Empire. Ultimately, her abusive attitude to the powers of The Throne, and allegations of improper relations with certain eternalists resulted in her being the only Throne to be revoked by the Imperial Synod. Despite her failings, she showed what the Empire was capable of when sufficient resources were given to its armies. Some of the most glorious battles in Imperial history

took place during her reign, and with her support the Navarr in particular made great advances in their fight to destroy the vallorn and reclaim their lost cities.

(257 YE - 281 YE) Reign of Emperor James

(281 YE - 300 YE) The Second Interregnum

(300 YE - 318 YE) Reign of Empress Deanne

Empress Deanne ended the Second Interregnum by taking the Throne in 300 YE, primarily in response to increased orc aggression. Her early reign was taken up with organising a fractious and complacent Senate, and helping a largely inexperienced Military Council deal with the dual threat of Grendel invasions along the southern coast, and a major effort by the Druj in the Barrens to claim Dawnguard.

(324 YE - 329 YE) Reign of Emperor Ahraz "the Liberator"

(331 YE - 346 YE) Reign of Empress Giselle "the Unwise"

(348 YE - 368 YE) Reign of Emperor Hugh, called "the Ill-Prepared"

(349 YE) The Empire lost control of Liathaven

(371 YE - 373 YE) Reign of Emperor Walter, "the Ham-fisted"

(374 YE - 376 YE) Coronation of Empress Britta, "the Young Empress"

(380 YE - 383 YE) Reign of Empress Lisabetta, "Empress of Flowers"

(381 YE) The Grey Pilgrims join the Navarr on the trods

(381YE – 383 YE) Reclaiming Westwood. The Liathaven Vallorn is pushed back.





***“If it’s not a tree made of screaming meat it’s not vallorn,
it’s just vegetation.”***

Leontes the Scribe, Imperial Archivist, Summer 383YE

HISTORICAL RESEARCH: ORIGINS OF THE VALLORN

Requested by Neb Firstdance, second Advisor on the Vallorn and first published in Summer 379YE. More recent versions of this document have been published by the Civil Service since. Major addendums will be included beneath the original wording.

Caveat: On the problems of researching the Vallorn To quote Magistrate Abraham, “the Vallorn seem to suffer an endemic problem with having every mysterious problem anyone can find assigned to them. This is particularly acute with the Navarr, who seem desperate to label everything that issues forth from the entire Spring Realm as a Vallorn, but the other nations are just as guilty. This makes it incredibly hard to carry out any reliable research on the Vallorn because there is no skepticism, no rigour to any of the claims made on it's behalf. Nobody questions anything. By accepting every conceivable claim made on behalf of the vallorn, those obsessed with it, have effectively buried the true danger beneath a mountain of fertilizer.”



This means that there is no shortage of theories as to the origin of the vallorn; what there is, is a complete lack of any reliable tool to separate crazy speculation from speculation at least peripherally grounded in facts. Furthermore, while there are literally acres of evidence of the existance of the vallorn today, it's very nature makes it next to impossible to use that evidence to extrapolate what the vallorn was like when it began – the nature of the vallorn is to change itself and the things it comes into contact with.

Finally, Emperor Nicovar destroyed almost all unified Imperial speculation on the vallorn prior to his firey reign. While he did not pursue the Navarr

specifically, a number of copies of old books and scrolls precious to the Navarr had been gifted to imperial libraries in the first century after the founding. Their loss was an incalculable blow to vallorn – and Terunael – scholarship. With these caveats in mind, we have done our best to winnow out the crazed theories and represent only verifiable facts. The vallorn is a phenomenon

The vallorn covers large areas of Hercynia, Liathaven, Therunin, and Broceliande. At one time, it completely covered these territories, and the territory of Miaren. The stridings and steadings of the Navarr have, over time, allowed portions of those territories to be reclaimed – and in the case of Miaren, entirely freed from vallorn infestation.

The vallorn itself is innately connected to the magic of the Spring realm. Speculation exists as to whether this means it is an intrusion into the mortal realm from the realm of Spring itself, or merely the result of an extremely powerful expression of mortal magic.

The vallorn spreads to fill all available territory, but like a ritual enchantment or curse tends not to extend beyond the borders of those territories without the assistance of outside forces. Specifically, attempts to spread the vallorn or utilise it as a doomsday weapon, have been reported occasionally in history but in all cases the nascent vallorn has been rooted out before it could gain purchase (see the recent events in Casinea, and the apocalyptic cult that prompted them).

Centuries before the Empire, humans lived in the fertile plains around the Bay of Catazaar. Before the vallorn existed there was a human civilisation in the area now occupied by the Empire which is called “Terunael”. It is believed that it was a contemporary of a number of other human cultures; the Suaq and Kallavesi on the cold plains of the north-west; the Ushka in the forests and hills of the north-east; the fore-runners of the Urizen (and perhaps the Axou) in the south-east; and the fore-runners of the Feni (and perhaps the Suranni, and the Faraden) in the south-west.

There may have been other tribes in the fertile plains, but no evidence of their existence has been found – although some scholars speculate that the structures credited to the paragon known as the Sentinel, or the dolmens of Bregasland, or the Sign of Tamar, may have been built by such a vanished tribe. They built cities, organized into loose kingdoms, and formed alliances with one another

The Terunael were clearly distributed over a wide area, as the locations of the modern forests indicate. It is believed that at the time the Terunael were active, much of this area would have been fertile plains scattered with normal woodlands. No reference to the cities as being built in “forests” has come to light during the exploration of the limited Terunael ruins.

While there are ruins that date to Terunael times in many places, there are no signs of large settlements outside of the five vallorn forests. This leads some researchers to speculate that the Terunael had more in common with the modern League than with the Navarr themselves. Without wishing to indulge fantasists, there is some circumstantial evidence to suggest Terunael may have grown out of a confederation of tiny kingdoms rather than beginning as a single nation. At the time of the disaster that ended it, however, there seems to be evidence it was culturally, legally, and possibly politically, unified.

The cities themselves were certainly large settlements, but not on the scale of the League cities of today. Exploration in Miaren has shown that the central “cities” were more likely closer to large towns, surrounded by a network of farms and villages. The largest of these towns is believed to have been Terunael itself, and it's ruins are said to stand at the heart of Broceliande.

There are persistent rumours of additional cities beyond the ones that are part of the Empire today. There are stories of a city north of Varushka, built in lands now dominated by the Thule, warmed and lit by an artificial sun. The city is generally referred to as “Emrys”. There is some historical evidence for this city – some vales in Varushka have Ushkan records that speak of people coming from the north fleeing a disaster led by a “brave woman marked by horror and pain, and her son” Some of these refugees settled in Varushka with the woman, others followed her son and joined with “their cousins to the south”- the people who would become the Navarr.

Another rumour talks of a city east of Therunin, somewhere in the Mallum, built on the edge of a great marsh and referred to as Béantal Dol.

A third rumour suggests there is a city south of Sarvos, drowned beneath the Bay of Catazaar, which is called “Feion Essa” and appears in fanciful stories. A common thread in the tale is the idea that the drowned city is inhabited by a race of intelligent fishpeople who consort with dolphins and live a life of idyllic splendour. Most of these stories can be traced to a book written in the League sometime in the early days of the Empire and are almost certainly rubbish.

Finally, there are some unconfirmed reports that there is a vallorn in modern-day Axos. If this is the case, then it is likely that at the heart of this vallorn is another Terunael settlement. The Terunael were engaged in a war against the orcs

This is a common, recurring element in stories of the fall of Terunael and the birth of the vallorn. One or more orc tribes were making war against them. The forerunners of the Druj and the Thule in particular are believed to have been invading the territories claimed by the Terunael in the east and north.

There is little evidence of unified attacks – as today, the orc tribes were separate and fractious. Colwyn of Boarsdell has presented the theory that a third major factor lies in two tribes of orcs who are no longer in existence today. These additional tribes occupied the lands now dominated by Dawn and the Marches today. One tribe would have been the ancestors of the orcs finally exterminated by the Dawnish in Semmerholm during their first wave of expansion. The other tribe most likely were the ancestors of the orcs driven out of the Marches, who later joined with the Jotun in the west. He further suggests that the bandit orcs of the Lasambrian hills are likely to be the descendants of the same orcs who attacked Liathaven during the fall of Terunael, before being driven west by the Freeborn exodus.

Either way, the true victors of the fall of Terunael were certainly the orcs. There are plenty of references that the human settlers who would later help form the Empire (Highguard, Dawn, Steirn/Vard) encountered land populated by prosperous, healthy tribes of orcs who had spread across the lands between the vallorn forests.

Navarr stories record that its cultured cities were run by its magicians. That the Terunael were ruled by magicians is taken for granted; however, it is based on only limited evidence. It is possible that the Navarr see the cities as having been run by magicians because their ancestors were desperate to blame someone for the disaster. This may be why the modern Navarr vates are seen as servants of the people, and expected to commit themselves to helping others rather than seeking positions of leadership.

There is also little evidence for how these magicians ruled. Were they organised into noble houses? Was there a council like our modern Conclave? Was there a single ruling magician in each city, similar to the Jarmish Magician-Prince? What was the status of people who were not magicians? The

idea that Terunael was “run by magicians” is often used as evidence to support the idea that the vallorn was summoned in some fashion by magic – but it is a shaky foundation on which to found an entire theory. In the ongoing war against the orcs, Terunael increasingly relied on magic. This makes perfect sense regardless of whether Terunael was run by its magicians. Indeed,

Ham Whitelock of the Crimson Banner (a Highborn scholar of the vallorn writing in the reign of Emperor James) theorised that even if Terunael were not ruled by magicians before the orcs began to invade, they could easily have siezed power during the resulting turmoil.

Magic is one of the most powerful tools mortals can wield to effect large-scale change; it can also mean the difference between life and death on a battlefield. Without warning the rituals around Terunael unwound catastrophically This common belief about the appearance of the vallorn is contentious.

Callus Strategos, Dean of the Lyceum in the time of Empress Brannan, wrote: “Rituals don't go wrong. They only do what they do - but they might do it in an unexpected way. Especially if you are overly impressed with your own cleverness.” He expounded the theory that the vallorn was not the result of a magical accident, but a calculated attempt to achieve something very similar to what eventually resulted.

It is not inconceivable that the Terunael attempted to combine powerful enchantments, and in their desperation combined effects that were in some way incompatible with each other prompting a disastrous, unexpected reaction. Magicians know it is possible to enchant a region within a territory, a territory itself, and a group of unified territories with an effect such as Hallow of the Green World.

This still does not suggest an “accident” as such. Not least because it is hard to imagine circumstances that would cause the same accident to overtake anywhere between five and nine well-established settlements simultaneously or near simultaneously.

Again, it is possible the early Navarr characterised the creation of the vallorn in this way as an accident to distance their ancestors from criticism. An accident is the fault of fate, or chance, and cannot be easily avoided. Carelessness, desperation, a lack of wisdom – these are the failings of humans.

The vallorn appeared as part of the disaster that overthrew the cities of ancient Terunael. Some scholars speculate that the fall of Terunael was not caused by the vallorn but by some other mysterious force. The fact remains, however, that the vallorn acted on Terunael society in a similar way to which a full-stop acts on a sentence. The vallorn destroyed Terunael.

All the stories, all the anecdotal evidence, and indeed all the physical evidence, agree that the disaster happened roughly simultaneously in each Terunael city. At the very least, if the disaster had happened in one or some of the cities and not all, it is likely that the unaffected cities would have offered aid to their allies, or at the very least taken some precautions – and there is little sign of this. From the hearts of those cities, abundant greenery spread. The vallorn began in the a sick, infectious wave of life that cracked and crumbled stone, shot great trees up through streets and buildings, and warped, twisted and destroyed most of the inhabitants of those cities, scattering the others to the wind.

The modern perception of this event is of a wave of unstoppable magic exploding from the hearts of the city and washing over the land like a glowing green tidal wave. Fractured accounts suggest that the reality was somewhat different. While the hearts of the cities were consumed very quickly, the rate of growth appears to have slowed as it expanded rather than accelerated.

The reports talk of “refugees attempting to claim back their lands” and of “warriors (who) fought the spread of the green hell” and perhaps most tellingly “their people attacked by monstrous insects and deadly plants, and though they tried everything to fight it, in the end they had no choice but to abandon their homes.”

Without doubt the vallorn directly was the cause of massive loss-of-life, but it's initial spread was slow enough that the fore-runners of the Navarr (and perhaps other people now lost to antiquity) were able to flee to the “safety” of the plains.

These initial resistance groups were the first to discover the practical problem of fighting the vallorn. The vallorn is an aura that promotes life. Cut back a briar bush in a vallorn inested area and it will regrow even as you are trying to cut down it's neighbour. Even fire is ineffective – it seems to find little purchase on living vegetation within the vallorn.

A remedy was discovered however in the Dance of Navarr and Thorn – a ritual that siphons off the magical power that sustains the vallorn. Once weakened, the vegetation and creatures that thrive within it can be defeated. Unfortunately, it is a slow process. Any hope that the proto-Navarr might have had that they could quickly reclaim their homelands were swiftly dashed. The Navarr fought desperately to destroy the vallorn

There is no doubt that the Navarr fought the vallorn, before they were even called the Navarr. Not everyone fought however – the story of the “woman from the north” has already been mentioned. There is some evidence that some of the Terunael survivors sought refuge with the Ushka, or among the Feni, and some very scattered mentions that some of them might have ended up in the mountains with the Urizen (already in their high refuge by the time of the fall of the cities).

It must also be remembered that the vallorn disaster occurred in the middle of an invasion of human-controlled lands by the orc tribes. It is likely that an unknown number of refugees were killed by the orc armies as they fled their now-inhospitable lands. Others no doubt were taken as slaves or thralls, or died due to the many other dangers that lie in wait in the wilderness.

Those who did survive, and did try to fight were unified by “Navarr and Thorn” - legendary figures who may or may not have existed. It is unclear how much time passes between the fall of the cities and the sacrifice of these potentially-mythical figures, but the ritual that creates the trods is clearly performed for the first time within at most two or three decades of the disaster.

Contemporary scholars disagree, but there is written evidence from the earliest days of Highborn expansion that the first Dance of Navarr and Thorn was performed in Broceliande, in the ruins of Terunael itself (assuming that city exists, or was called Terunael by its inhabitants). The rest of the trod network may have extended from Broceliande, or it may have been expanded from each of the other cities in turn until the five were connected by trods.

There is no evidence that a trod network surrounds any of the other cities – if they are real and not fictional. There is one line in a dusty scroll about Navarr/Highborn relations that talks about a “brave band of brands, who went up the river, and never returned” which may be a reference to an attempt to extend the trods to include “Beantal Dol” in the Mallum. Given that area is part

of the Druj heartlands, it is perhaps unsurprising that these Navarr did not return.

The vallorn resembles a malignant, hostile, magical ecosystem. There is no clear guiding intelligence behind the vallorn. It does not plan, and it does not appear to be aware of itself or the world. It is not a creature, and the stories that it is some horrible pseudo-eternal from the Spring realm appear to be without real foundation in the opinion of this researcher. “The vallorn” may itself be misleading. It is possible that the vallorn is no more a contiguous entity than any forest, marsh, town, or farmland. Creatures live in it; plants live in it; there is obviously a supernatural force at work. Yet it is not clear if that force operates with a purpose or not. It does not seem to actively expand itself, for example. Cases where vallorn creatures or plants have been encountered outside of an actual area of vallorn power always seem to be the result of tampering by humans or orcs.

Creatures within the vallorn enjoy unnatural vitality, while the air itself appears inimical to humans, but the so-called vallorn-miasma might just as easily be a product of some creature or vegetable that lives in the vallorn rather than a product of the same magic that provides supernatural health – and creates ettercaps and vallornspawn.

The miasma itself underlines how much is still unknown by Imperial scholars about the vallorn. For example, the earliest stories that speak of the Terunael fleeing their cities, and the Navarr fighting the vallorn, do not speak of the miasma at all. It seems peculiar that such an abominable phenomenon would be considered inconsequential, even taking into account the apocalyptic nature of the collapse they were experiencing. Yet by the time the Empire is founded, the miasma is ubiquitous. Yet the creatures that live symbiotically within the vallorn's compass seem unaffected by it.

The nature of the vallorn appears to be to transform creatures and plants within it, yet there are no records of Navarr steadings producing abominable beasts, or even having a higher-than-natural incidence of briar births.

There is still a great deal more to learn about the vallorn, it is clear – but such research must be undertaken by modern scholars, rather than sought in the writings of historians and past scholars who have taken too much for granted, and not thoroughly questioned their assumptions.

Appendix I : Rhonwen and the Withering of Miaren

In the early years of the Empire, with the assistance of their new allies, the Navarr launched a major offensive into the territory surrounding the Terunael city known as Seren. A combination of the (relative) peace wrought by the nations that would become the Empire, followed by their unification, had allowed the trods to expand more than at any time since their initial creation. Increased security and the protection of the Imperial law allowed the Navarr stridings to travel the trods in greater numbers than ever before in their history.

The time being right, the Navarr engaged on one of their most ambitious projects to date. Specifically, the attempt to reclaim an entire territory from the vallorn. The central city of Seren was chosen because of its location. Since the trod network was completed, Seren had benefitted the most from the slow leeching of the vallorn's power and was judged to be ripe for liberation.

The vate Rhonwen helped to lay the groundwork fifteen years before the first major offensive. A quiet, introspective woman who was profoundly deaf from birth, she became an adept wielder of ritual magic – and archmage of Winter on three occasions. She put forward a theory that the vallorn energies were nothing more than a massive, hitherto unknown, regio of the spring realm. Her theory was extremely radical – she theorized further that the problem was the relationship between this magical energy – this super-regio – and the plants and animals that lived inside it. She pointed to the way that Winter regio were known to spontaneously coalesce around battlefields and burial grounds.

While not all Winter regio occupied such locations, there was almost always a connection between the area where the regio occurred and the resonances of the realm it was connected to. Indeed, eternalists had been known to be capable of actively exploiting these connections for centuries, and several were known to offer boons relating to the creation of regio (most especially Prospero, Sadogua, Sorin, and Yaw'nagrah). She believed that the anchoring effect of the vallorn was tied to the fertility and vitality of the creatures in the area, just as it reinforced and heightened those qualities.

Her plan was relatively simple – she and her coven would invoke the ritual known as Wither the Seed in Seren, provided an appropriate regio could be located. In the end, Rhonwen prevailed upon one of the eternalists of Winter – believed to be either Sorin or possibly Kaela – for a boon relating to the temporary creation of a strong winter regio in the heart of the area now known

as Rhonwen's Fall. Her coven – the Silent Word – and a cadre of thorns managed to secure the area and evoke the regio.

They performed the ritual, but were overwhelmed by ettercaps and a veritable army of vallornspawn husks – some clearly dating back to the fall of Seren itself. The ritual had the usual effect, but it is not clear how much benefit this was to the eventual campaign to reclaim Seren.

Indeed, some historians point out that the ritual effects lasted for a further decade after the territory was reclaimed, and may have been responsible for the slow speed of the Navarr rebuilding there. Wose, it robbed the Navarr of a powerful and influential figure who might have helped them arrange the campaign against Seren earlier had she been around.

Historians do agree that her ritual had an effect – the ettercaps were sluggish and slow to respond to the initial Imperial invasion of the territory, at the very least, allowing the human armies to liberate an additional region before they (and the other vallorn beasts) were fully roused to murderous fury.

Regardless, her history is included here because her theory – that the vallorn was a force of spring magic, and that it was involved in a symbiotic relationship with the creatures and vegetation that inhabited it – has obvious bearings on the origin and nature of the vallorn.

Appendix II : Arnaud di Sarvos

I am indebted to my late colleague Arnaud di Sarvos who was murdered while pursuing his own investigation on this topic the last time the Advisor on the Vallorn demanded research on this topic. While Arnaud was unable to complete his research due to having his throat slit by assassins, his notes survived and I believe were given to the Advisor during the Summer Solstice.

Ardnaud was one of our most competent reseachers, and it would be extremely difficult to replicate his work. His time studying at the School of Epistemology in Tassato, and the two decades of loyal service he gave the Empire as an aide to the Imperial Syod before ill-health forced him to adopt the more sedentary life of a researcher, had given him a unique capacity to spot seemingly trivial details and to connect seemingly unconnected facts to reveal a larger picture.

Unfortunately the notes of Calladan of Widow's walk (murdered while travelling to his family home); the work of Douglas Wyrddwatcher (murdered while visiting Canterspire in Morrow to look into the magical roots of the Vallorn); and Bridget Windsdottir a sworn pacifist who had chosen to devote her life in service to the Empire, and one of the department's finest minds) were either incomplete or unreadable due to the amount of blood on them and so could not be incorporated. In the name of completeness, however, we have included a transcript of Arnaud's notes here.

Transcript Quote from Abraham:

"The Vallorn seem to suffer an endemic problem with having every mysterious problem anyone can find assigned to them. This is particularly acute with the Navarr, who seem desperate to label everything that issues forth from the entire Spring Realm as a Vallorn, but the other nations are just as guilty. This makes it incredibly hard to carry out any reliable research on the Vallorn because there is no skepticism, no rigour to any of the claims made on its behalf. Nobody questions anything. By accepting every conceivable claim made on behalf of the Vallorn, those obsessed with it, have effectively buried the true danger beneath a mountain of fertilizer."

Too direct?

Where are Vallorn? Hercynia, Therunin, Broceliande, Liathaven. Apparently Skuld. Find evidence.

Only five left? One creature or several? Creature? Could write whole paper just on nature - summarize only. Don't waste extra time.

Why only Terunael territories? No Ushka, Suaq, Kallavesi, Urizen, Feni. Contemporary reports.

Action: enquire older Urizen spires with reference 'Vallorn' documents Any reference to a "new" Vallorn being created after disaster of Vallornday?

Nothing in initial search - damn Nicovar.

Does 'Vallorn' spread? No records of cleansed regions being reclaimed even w/damage to trods.

Anecdotes of attempts to actively spread 'Vallorn' (Marches, Dawn, Wintermark, Brass Coast?).

Action: collect stories check veracity.

Common theory - similarity between Thunderous Tread of the Trees and 'Vallorn'. Avenue - Archmage Spring. Ref. paper on M.B.B prep'd for Advisor on Vallorn.

Marcher coven suggests "unleashing" 'Vallorn' in Liathaven to isolate Jotun forces in Mourn. Feasible? If feasible, could provide information about spread of 'Vallorn'.

Action - Locate Marcher coven. Interview Archmage Spring.

"As trods are walked, and as the area they are walked over increases, the vallorn quakes." Get access to areas of weak 'Vallorn' - look for more information - places round the perimeter where miasma spillover not saturation. Speak to vates? Study ritual?

Avenue: Iulian Shatterspire. alleged vision (?) conversation with Eternal about 'Vallorn' origins.

'Vallorn' appears during orc invasion, proto-Druj invaded Terunael (Broceliande). What do they know?

Avenue; Druj Ghulai Greenmask. Anecdotal evidence of familiarity with trods; are there 'Vallorn' in Mallum? Greenmask has shown tendency to approach the Empire already. Would Winged Messenger be treason?

Likely in citadel in Reikos. Action: ask MC for known name, check magistrate, send WM?

Theory: Callus - "Rituals don't go wrong. They only do what they do - but they might do it in an unexpected way. Especially if you are overly impressed with your own cleverness"

Action: Contact Lyceum, research Callus Avenue: Eternals. Yaw'nagrath? Conceptual link. Also old - could remember. Llofir - def. conceptual link. Fall of civilisations? Whisper Gallery/Sadogua. Secrets and magic. Leviathan - someone must have asked Leviathan.

Record - damn Nicovar. Rumours V is sentient due to liao. Total rubbish, no evidence. V. is geography how would this even work? Speak to theologian. List of Navarr guides? Liao won't even work on orcs, how will work on a bush? Did they use a watering can?

There is also reference here and there to a third legendary figure. The stories of Drustan (or Durstan) of the Briars is little known in the Empire, the body of his work was largely lost to Nicovar's folly.

He was born in Holtford in Miaren in 243YE, studied magic from a young age and was regarded as one of the foremost vates of his age. He was allegedly a driven man, so obsessed with the vallorn that it occupied his every waking moment - to the extent that people admired him more than liked him.

Drustan was instrumental in several major battles against the Vallorn, and was noted especially for his skills in turning Spring magic back on the creatures of the Vallorn to destroy them. The tales that credit him with identifying the vallorn susceptibility to poison should be regarded with suspicion, it is unlikely that Drustan achieved this feat alone, and it seems somewhat far-fetched that it was not already widely known by Drustan's time. What cannot be denied is that as a youth Drustan was regarded as the most brilliant warrior-magician of his age - possessed of an unerring instinct for picking the time to fight the vallorn he won battle after battle until his fall from grace.

After the great defeat in Brocéliande in 268YE, when over 6,000 Navarr lost their lives, Drustan swore off war against the vallorn claiming that the Navarr were pursuing the wrong approach. Thereafter his work became increasingly experimental and people start referring to him as eccentric. He made public speeches criticizing the Navarr leaders accusing them of trying to play the Vallorn at its own game. Not surprisingly such views were not well received and Drustan was soon increasingly isolated. While his genius with magic could not be denied, his political views were simply unacceptable.

An excellent example of this lack of political acumen is taken from the speech given by Drustan at a standing in Liathaven in 272YE, a copy of which still exists! The meeting had been called to discuss the possible risks of the Vallorn in Liathaven spreading, a fear which apparently occupied the Navarr minds as much then as it does today. Drustan became increasingly agitated and when finally allowed he berated everyone present. Reading the transcript, you can virtually hear him shouting - "You shit-eating fools! Spreading the Vallorn? What in Thorn's name do you think the fucking ritual does? It spreads the Vallorn! Go and study the magic - that's EXACTLY what the ritual fucking does." There are no further records of Drustan speaking publicly after this occasion.

If this were all there was to tell of Drustan, that would probably be the end of the matter, a brilliant, but misguided briar who descended into inevitable madness from the hours spent studying Spring magic. But his lifelong friend - Arrayne, a Dawnish troubadour claims that Drustan made some kind of breakthrough at the end. He met with Arrayne a final time, in Summer 278YE and told her that he had solved the Vallorn problem. Arrayne claims that Drustan explained everything to him, but unfortunately Arrayne's understanding of magic was allegedly non-existent and all he could recall later was that Drustan was convinced he had worked out how to fix the vallorn and that it all sounded very convincing.

Few people take this very seriously as Drustan immediately set off - alone - into the vallorn heart of Liavathen - apparently to prove his theory. Given that he never emerged and was never found, it seems likely that it was his mind that had broken new ground and not his theories. Of course it is also technically possible he had solved the problem and he was simply eaten by an Ettercap before he could prove it. Likely we will never know. His name briefly became a byword for brilliant minds with no friends and then eventually it was just forgotten altogether. Arguably, given how long the Navarr have dedicated themselves to the work of fighting the vallorn, it is actually rather strange that there aren't more figures like Drustan in their history.

ADDENDUMS

More recent versions of this research remain largely the same with changes serving mostly improve formatting for ease of reading. However, there are updates, most major of which being information on the Terunael cities outside the Empire. I include the revised wording on that section here:

Further Cities

There are persistent rumours of additional cities beyond the ones that are part of the Empire today, some of which have been confirmed in recent years. The stories of a city north of Varushka, built in lands now dominated by the Thule, have proved to be true. The city of *Emrys* stood in what is now south-western Sküld, and the claim that the cold tundra around it was warmed and lit by an artificial sun appears to have been based partially on fact. Previously, the only evidence were claims from vales in Varushka about Ushkan records that speak of people coming from the north fleeing a disaster lead by a “brave woman marked by horror and pain, and her son.” Some of these refugees settled in Varushka with the woman, others followed her son and joined with “their cousins to the south”- the people who would become the Navarr. As the peace with the northern orcs continues, more facts begin to come to life that seem to confirm these ancient accounts.

For centuries there were unconfirmed reports that there is a vallorn in modern-day Axos. A recent expedition, funded by the Advisor on the Vallorn, and arranged with the aid of the Ambassador to Axos and their counterparts in the eastern nation, confirmed the existence of an immense vallorn in the centre of Axos. According to the first-hand account of Ellian Sweetwater, the civil servant who lead the expedition, the vallorn at Visokuma is the largest known to exist and surrounds the ruins of the city of *Cavan*.

Another rumour talks of a city east of Therunin, somewhere in the Mallum, built on the edge of a great marsh and referred to as *Béantal Dol*. Again, there is a body of evidence that supports the existence of this city, including accounts of first-hand reports from a Druj Ghulai named Greenmask. Located as it is in the Druj homelands, however, the truth of any such claims are treated cautiously by Imperial scholars.

Finally, there are stories of a city south of Sarvos, drowned beneath the Bay of Catazar, which is called “Feion Essa” and appears in fanciful stories. A common thread in the tale is the idea that the drowned city is inhabited by a

race of intelligent fish-people who consort with dolphins and live a life of idyllic splendour. Most of these stories can be traced to a book written in the League sometime in the early days of the Empire and are widely discounted by serious scholars although it is not uncommon for an optimistic treasure hunter to launch an expedition into the Bay to find this lost city.

ON TERUNAEI

This section contains research into the ancient civilisation of Terunael. Included in these pages are the following:

The past life vision of Irada von Temeschwar who was the magister of a Terunael city. This account confirms the Terun use of slaves as well as their attitude to other civilisations (in this case the Feni)

The past life vision of Iulian Shatterspire who was a councillor in the city of Emrys. His accounts detail the councillor's advising against The Great Work and how she escaped.

A fragment of a Terun document found in the Feverwater that details the attitude towards the Gwerin Morfa. It is also referenced in Iulian Shatterspire's past life vision.

The past life vision of Father Drakov of the Vor'azi who was a Terunael magister. His vision centres on a council's trying to decide if it was the right time to cast The Great Ritual.

The Arc of Skuld is a ritual akin to Wither the Seed, it's a widespread Winter curse that could be used to blight the land and slow any Vallorn growth in a territory. The ritual text details how the people of Terunael travelled north and founded Emrys. It also documents Terunael attitudes and what happened when the meteors fell.

Research notes and visions from Mourning Hollow, an ancient battleground but also homes Terunael ruins. Investigation of the area once called the 'Temple of Phaleron' unearthed insights into a Terun building that survived the fall.

Historical Research into Star who was a Spring and Summer vate and travelling companion of Navarr and Thorn. While the results of the research is limited it gives some interesting insights.

Notes on the expedition to Axos that saw cooperation between the Axou and our historical researchers to learn about their historical interactions with the Terun and the nature of their Vallorn. This extensive document in three parts brought a lot of new information into the Empire.

Historical Research on Ghita's Veils in Segura. This potent mana site holds structures of Terunael origin and hints towards the magical prowess of the Terun mages and ways in which they channelled mana.

Historical Research into the Sungold Pass. This is included here for its glimpses into a location homing Terunael ruins. In particular a mine warmed by magical means.

And finally, I have included some 'Advisor's Notes' on the topic of Terunael and the documents listed above.

Past Life Vision of Irada von Temeschwar as documented in Echoes of the Labyrinth.

Spring Equinox, 380YE
Irada von Temeschwar (League)
Accompanied by Hywel Summercrow (Navarr)

Irada was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary and guide together.

The visionary came to in a windowless room, sat in a chair on a dais, with an advisor on either side of them. There was a wall of small, bound books behind the visionary, and tables to one side with many candles, a scroll case, letters, fruit, and a well-crafted glass bottle of water with a drinking glass.

The advisors were both unlineaged men in long light blue robes, and one wore boots while the other was barefoot. They addressed the visionary as a magister of the Terunael empire, whose name was short and began with F (the visionary did not catch any more of the name than that).

They were about to pass judgement on a slave who'd destroyed a mana site, and murdered a cousin of the magus who owned the mana site. One of their advisors suggested compassion, and the other advised a brutal demonstration of power.

When the visionary asked why the slave might have destroyed the mana site, the advisors did not have a clear idea, other than that they believed the slaves to be uncivilised savages who would cause an uprising.

The visionary asked for the magus and the slave to be brought in. The magus was also unlineaged and wearing light blue robes, holding a wand or rod in one hand, and was barefoot, while the slave wore black. The magus's name was Parvus, and he said he wanted the slave killed - he didn't care for the property value of the slave, but he wanted the slave's eyelids ripped off so the slave couldn't look away while his whole family were tortured before he was executed. The magus said the slave's tears would bring him joy.

Next the visionary asked the slave why he had committed the crime. The slave kept his head down, except when looking up in defiance. He said it was for freedom, and that Terunael had taken their land, enslaved their god, enslaved them, and where he fell more would take his place. The visionary sent the slave to one side, and asked the advisors what he meant by "enslaving their god".

The advisors said they were not comfortable discussing this in front of the slave, so the visionary sent the magus and slave away again for a while. The advisors, the magus and the slave all spoke what sounded like Imperial, although the slave had an accent that sounded like Iaith. The slave was apparently one of the Feni, and the advisors said that "we need to make a clear statement, we don't want to appear weak to the orcs around us and the Feni".

Once they were gone, the visionary asked again about the enslavement of the god, and the advisors said, "you know, the project". There was some sort of experiment happening on a creature whom the slaves venerated as a god, and the advisors thought this was a superstitious belief, but they apparently didn't know much and the visionary was in a position where they would know more about it. There was apparently to be a council meeting at nine o'clock that night about it.

The visionary talked about how to prevent this happening again, and wondered aloud what the cause was. They said this might become a bigger problem, and that one way to stop it might be to bring the slaves into their culture. The advisors scoffed and said no, to which the visionary suggested they try it - what would they say if they were explaining their culture to a slave?

The advisors said that it was about magic, power and knowledge, and that a slave shouldn't understand these things, and it wouldn't be good for them or for their civilisation for slaves to learn. The visionary replied that if you have minions who work for you but who aspire to be you, then they won't rebel, and that there may be those who would rise above the rest and could be shown civilisation, to return to their people and show it to them. Through having people working with you, rather than just for you, a civilisation would be stronger and have a better economy.

The magus and the slave were brought back in again. The visionary asked the slave to describe his crime, to which he said, "I have struck a spark, I have lit a fire". The visionary asked if he understood the consequences of his crime, and the slave said yes, and that more would follow. The visionary then clarified with the magus that he didn't care about the property loss of losing the slave's family, and the magus confirmed that he didn't care. The visionary's final judgement was to have that slave executed, have his family made the property of the visionary and they would be shown civilisation.

The advisor who had previously suggested brutal behaviour seemed persuaded of the visionary's arguments by the end. None of them questioned the visionary's authority, and even the magus made no objection to them taking the slave's family as their own.

After the visionary gave their judgement, the two advisors stood up, said, "Judgement is passed", and the vision ended.

Irada and Hywel had their souls examined by the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, Irada had a dedication to Vigilance with the strength of a single priest behind it, and Hywel had a testimony of "New Scion" with the strength of a single priest. After the vision, the state of their souls was unchanged.

Past Life Vision of Iulian Shatterspire as documented in Echoes of the Labyrinth.

Winter Solstice, 378YE

Iulian of the Spire of Shattered Art Reforged, also known as Shatterspire
(Urizen)

Accompanied by Allegra of Shatterspire

Iulian was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary and guide separately, although there were some confounding factors in the reliability of the initial testimony, as described after the vision account.

The visionary came to in a room with a small indoor garden in one corner, a bed with white sheets and a cot at one end in another corner, and a table next to the visionary in a third corner. The table had lightstones and two sheets of paper on it, which were a letter, apparently from Merenael, a councillor of the city of Emrys, to the councillor of another city (the second councillor's name may have been Amrillin).

The letter spoke of visions that Merenael had had, with apologies that the visions were from the Night realm - they had taken place in the Dreamscape - and thus metaphorical, but nevertheless gave a clear pattern of events. The letter warned of terrible doom that would befall the City of the Red Gold Sun - Emrys - if the Great Work they were working on was completed, and that the same doom would happen to the other cities.

A man burst into the room. He was briar-lineaged, and greeted the visionary by name, calling them "Merri" and "my love". There were sounds from outside of the city collapsing - fire, falling masonry, and the screams of people and animals. The man said that they had two doses of an elixir, and that he and Merenael could go into the Dreamscape (the visionary asked if he meant physically, and he said yes) and they could escape together, leaving their child. The visionary said they refused to leave the child, and that the man should take the elixir and give the other dose to the child so that the two of them could escape. The man said he couldn't face leaving the visionary to the doom that was befalling Emrys, and refused to do what they asked. The two of them argued briefly, and then the visionary said, "If you will not take it, then I will."

The man looked at the visionary in disbelief, and the visionary clasped his hand and said to him, "Strength," then fed the elixir first to the child in the cradle and then to himself. When the visionary took the elixir, the vision ended. When Iulian emerged from the vision, he had a taste in his mouth like that of dried tea or ashes. Later at the summit, Iulian underwent a ritual based on Shift the Dreamscape's Sands, in which he learned more details of the fall of Emrys, and the name of the man in the vision, which was Fallahd.

Iulian's soul was examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, his soul bore a dedication to Vigilance, an anointing of the Demands of Vigilance, and a testimony of "Wisely Cautious", each with the strength of a single priest. (The blatant ungrammaticality of the testimony has interesting spiritual ramifications, but those will be discussed in a separate work.)

After the vision, as well as the dedication, anointing and testimony, Iulian's soul looked like it had had a piece taken out of it, leaving the rest of it thin and apparently undernourished. An anointing with the strength of seven priests would have served to nourish the soul and restore it to its former effect, but an exorcism with the strength of three priests behind it was enough to clear away the remaining effect to let the soul recover on its own.

Allegra's soul was also examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, her soul bore a dedication to Pride with the strength of a single priest. After the vision, as well as this dedication, her soul was also covered with a gnawing shadow, whose effect was to compel her to avoid having Insight cast on her and avoid talking about what she had seen in the vision by any means, and at least initially to stop Iulian from doing the same. When he started speaking about the vision out loud after they returned from the Gateway, she apparently attacked him, and would have succeeded in killing him had it not been for the intervention of Adam of the Synod Civil Service. This effect also made it quite difficult to get a true account of the vision from her, and it was several hours before she could be persuaded to be In sighted and then have the shadow exorcised from her (as usual, it took the strength of seven priests).

In this case, a possible cause of the wound to Allegra's soul may be the following events during the vision. When Fallahd entered the room, another figure also entered behind him. He did not act as if he could see the figure, but it whispered to him to "give in to your despair" and "leave the child" during

the conversation shortly before Fallahd suggested that the two of them take the elixir and leave their child in Emrys. At this point, Allegra was rereading the letter from Merenael, and the figure then turned to look at Allegra and spoke to her, telling her "leave this place - this place is mine, these souls are mine, their despair is mine" and threatening to gut her like a fish. It divided its attention between Fallahd and Allegra, and then tried a second time to gain Allegra's attention. When she asked "What are you?", it said it was the Eater of Hope. It appeared to have a rune on its right cheek - either Aesh or Rhyv.

A very similar figure appeared later at the summit during a casting of Whispers Through the Black Gate to call back Ynez di Caricomare's spirit; it appeared after Ynez did. It had runes on its face - Aesh on the forehead, Ophis on the right cheek and Sular on the left cheek - and called on the ritualists to "give me your fear, give me your anguish", and cast waves of force that knocked the ritualists back.

Weapons and exorcism did not affect the figure itself, but a casting of Pakaan's Iron Shutters to close the portal opened by Whispers made the figure disappear. The ritualists who had been involved were spiritually wounded such that they felt trapped in the Labyrinth; an exorcism with the strength of seven priests behind it, as in many cases, dealt with these wounds.

Given that this figure appeared as part of a casting of Whispers Through the Black Gate, it seems likely it is some sort of malign spiritual presence. What False Virtue it is a manifestation of is not certain, although Despair or something along those lines would make sense. In any case, it is a useful reminder for ritualists performing Whispers to have someone on hand to close the ritual quickly if need be, and for both ritualists and those interacting with visionaries to be alert for when exorcists are needed.

Further investigation into the figure identifying itself as the Eater of Hope also gave a name for the child in the vision, which is Jarith of Emrys. For further information about this investigation, please talk to Levitia of Endsmeet Spire in Urizen

Past Life Vision and Subsequent Dreams of Iulian Shatterspire

as documented in a letter to Neb Firstdance (Advisor on the Vallorn at the time) following the summit of Winter 378YE.

NEB

The following is a precis of my vision and surrounding work. Fuller versions are available, however at the request of my collaborator for the surrounding work, I am keeping references deliberately obscure. Something happened in my vision that is an open challenge for Imperial Virtue and until I have run that past my spiritual advisors and the Assemblies of Vigilance and Wisdom I'm afraid the account that you will get is an expurgated one.

The horoscope for my vision and surrounding work should be understood to be Wanderer surmounting Fountain crossing Phoenix.

In Vigilance I should note at this point that no part of any of this record should be understood as intended to contravene any of the Doctrines of Imperial Faith, and anybody intending to reference this work in the spirit of odological enquiry is enjoined in the strongest possible terms to go and have their damn head examined.

My vision

The process of the Gateway proceeded as usual, without difficulty. I took the liao as a liquid, and lost consciousness before the rune of destiny was pronounced

The vision initiated with me standing before a table, which I took initially for a writing-desk but was in fact a mage's workbench. It was illuminated by between four and seven lightstones similar in design to those of Urizen, and it was clear immediately that it belonged to my past life. The room was illuminated by lightstones and decorated in sparse pastels after the Urizeni fashion, but it was too cramped and crowded to be Urizeni. It held a double bed in one corner, a cradle at its foot containing a strangely quiet baby; in another corner there was something indistinct which my Guide later informed me was some kind of garden. I could hear howling as of a high, winter wind. I do not recall any particular smell or temperature.

Before me was an unsent proof-copy of a letter to an individual whose name I have forgotten (it will be recorded in Echoes v.s.) and within the edge of an instant I recognised that individual as the man referred to as "Father of my blood" in the Gwerin Morfa Fragment; I know not whether this was a truth of

the vision or an inference of my own memory. First I scanned the document quickly as I scattered the two pages on my desk, noting the sender as Councillor Merenael of the city of Emrys. If there was a date or other address, I did not see it. Upon understanding that my past life must have been reading this document at the time of the vision I read it more thoroughly.

The document was a last and possibly desperate attempt to dissuade the councillor from Tharunind from the completion of something called 'the Great Work' (Merenael's capitals). It spoke of visions that Merenael's coven (the word 'coven' was used) had received by entering the Dreamscape, visions of the future that the recipient knew had been borne out before (although it did not give specifics). It foretold the coming of a great doom, not if the Great Work should fail, but if it should succeed; a doom that was already descending inescapably upon Emrys. It foretold that this doom should spread out to encompass the whole of Terunael. It provided some information speaking of a personal connection between the two councillors - that Merenael knew that the recipient's son was 'trapped' in Beantal Dol, that the Great Work was thought to have the ability somehow to help with this, but that it would not work.

As I finished perusing the document and turned to examine my surroundings, the door to the chamber burst open and in came an attractive man in his prime, between seventeen and eighteen hands' height, dressed in serviceable but nondescript attire that my mind recalls as being blue, a man of great personal significance to Merenael. I identified him immediately as a briar based upon the energy of his movements and what I interpreted as bark upon his face, however the content of later dreams makes me wonder if this was incorrect. The man greeted me immediately as 'Merenael' and also used a pet name 'Merri'; he referred to me as 'my love'.

All that Merenael had seen and said had come to pass, he said; the doom had come upon Emrys, had come upon us all. That she had tried her best to dissuade them, to warn them. Affected by a malign spiritual presence that I could not feel, he reported to Merenael that all hope was lost, to which Merenael replied something along the lines of 'never'. He agreed not in the broad strokes I had expected but in somewhat narrower ones, focusing upon a thing that was on my workbench, an 'elixir', his words. There should be sufficient doses left, he opined, to take us from that place and into the Dreamscape and thus to escape the doom of Emrys.

The shock of the literality of his words was enough to cause me to say another thing which Merenael had not: I asked if he truly meant to travel physically to the Dreamscape, and his response was a slightly distracted ‘of course’.

Merenael refused flatly to leave her child. The man and Merenael went over to the cradle where our child lay, still arguing - Merenael said that she had failed to prevent the fall and thus she should stay, that he should take the elixir and use it to escape with their child; he refused to leave her and said that it was unknown what the effect of the elixir upon the child would be.

I felt Merenael’s mind close upon the core of what she had to do; I felt the moment when she made the decision. She physically took the elixir from her husband, took his hand, and said, in I believe this order, ‘Then I shall see you again, my love,’ and the word ‘Strength’ (the latter is a mannerism observable in me). Then as he stood there in shock and disbelief she fed the elixir first to her child and then to herself, and as her husband cried out, the vision ended.

Subsequent dreams: dream the first

I was standing atop a tall tower, looking out over a city. I noted that it was a white-granite tower, and that many of the buildings of the city were also of white granite, and I mused briefly upon what that substance was; I noticed further that this was my city, and that its name was Emrys, and that the name of the city ‘Emrys’ was so spelled, and that we were far to the north. I glanced up at a sphere that shed down upon me and my city a pleasing summer warmth, and I noted that this sphere was made of metal. And outside the walls of my city there was a forest.

Abruptly a crossbow bolt came from nowhere and buried itself in my stomach. And from that bolt, plant life burst, striking out with hatred and growing uncontrollably in all directions to consume the city. I was lifted up by this torrent of life and I was carried forwards; I was carried at the head of this surging torrent as it flowed onwards to consume all before it.

Dream the second

I was walking in Emrys, among its towers and arches, under the dim ember-glow of the sphere of metal otherwise known as the Redgold Sun, and I marked that that was not merely a description but its name. The stars above, I noticed, were alien to me; I am unfamiliar with the Dreamscape and know not the significance of this sight, but in my dream it did not trouble me overly. I was walking towards the pillar of the Redgold Sun, but I was never able to reach it.

The streets and plazas of Emrys were empty as I walked them, and I noted this fact as strange.

Between the towers and arches, keeping pace with me and allowing itself to be seen only occasionally, was a red-gold tiger the size of an ox, an animal in the physical prime of life. Somehow I knew it was no coincidence that I was seeing it.

Abruptly I came face to face with a man I knew, and I knew that he was the one the tiger sought. He appeared in his fifties or thereabouts, but he was a changeling: he could have been much older. And I knew him, I knew him immediately as Merenael's husband Fallahd - and once again an awareness that was mine and yet had not lived my life provided me with the exact spelling of her name and his even as she mourned for the loss of the man's youth. Branded on his forearms were Diras and Wyr, and again the ancient awareness impressed these runes upon my mind like clay in case I did not know what they were, and in that instant I recalled things I had never learned - old, old magic, the runes and the patterns that we traced and drew around and over and through them as we wove our work to Night, a poetry of physicality quite unknown to my waking mind, and I believe that had I not already been an accomplished magician, I'd still have understood it all just as well.

Somehow at the same time as this, from outside the city there rose a high, ululating wail, and the ember-glow of the Redgold Sun winked out, and the pillar upon which it stood cracked and slumped to one side. And the vallorn came in over the walls of Emrys. I do not know if I knew the name 'vallorn' from my own work or if Merenael knew it. Nevertheless it was exactly as the vallorn is. I cannot rightly describe it. A tide of life, a tide of hatred, a tide of death. The horror destroyed and consumed my city.

And Fallahd cried out Merenael's name and raised a disbelieving hand and his body rippled and changed, his jaw distended, his remaining eye popped and flowed down his face, and out and through him ripped the giant red-gold tiger and it came for me, and I was struck by the deep and abiding impression, almost as if spoken: *dead, undead, unliving, eternally trapped.*

In my dreams ever since I have been hunted by a giant red-gold tiger; sometimes it has shown itself to me in waking hallucinations. I awake refreshed, empowered, enlivened - the tiger speaks to the Spring in my blood and every morning I awaken with a surge of inhuman power. Such things are familiar to me: they usually happen around dawn following an all-nighter, or if I have visited the Winter realm or otherwise been drained. I believe the effect to be a lesser version of the Dreamscape of the Endless Hunt.

Iulian Shatterspire, who was Councillor Merenael of Emrys

Spring 379

Gwerin Morfa Fragment

The Gwerin Morfa document, recovered from the Feverwater by Griff Soaring Leaves in Autumn 378 and handed to Dredgemaster Corey Brackensong. With translations by the scholars of Bronwen's Rest.

Father of my blood,

The Gwerin Morfa are taking the brunt of the orc attack. I do not think they will hold out past winter. They fight like cornered rats, but they have no match for the cunning and cruelty of the beasts. Some captains fight with them. If they are called away, the Gwerin Morfa will collapse within a season. I know the council has asked for more aid from Tharunind. Even if that aid comes the captains will certainly be encouraged to join the main campaign and leave them to meet their destiny alone. They will not leave their marshes to fight alongside the host of Béantal Dol. The council will not order out warriors to fight alongside the Gwerin Morfa.

I have spoken to the councillors and reminded them how important it is to keep the marshes out of orc hands. They refuse to accept the danger. They say that there is a plan that will solve the orc problem once and for all- I do not know if they believe what they are saying. While their magic has been good at removing the poison the orcs favour I think some of their magic has proven more hindrance than aid.

If the orcs take the rest of the marches it will be very hard to reclaim them. It will mean the end of the Gwerin Morfa. Those who do not die will be slaves. Those who flee will join the refugees beating at the city gates. The orcs will scatter the marsh with fortified refuges. They will be free to attack and then retreat to their defences. They will wear the defenders away like rain on a rock.

This promises the end to trade with the Gwerin Morfa. This season the harvest was almost half what was predicted. Gwerin Morfa die or take up arms rather than gather dragonbone. The Pennaith told me that the people are unhappy. They want to use their asgwrn ddraig to make weapons against the orcs. If you want to continue trading you should offer them weapons and armour. A gift of a Hacynian blade will win the Pennaith over in the short term.

I say that you should not bother. By this time next year those we have dealt with will be fled. Or they will be dead, or they will be gathering that asgwrn ddraig for the orcs with eyes full of dread. We will make a sound profit from

our other trades with the city but I predict that the wealth these trades bring in will continue to fall.

My wife has read the portents. She is convinced that the city will fall before our child is born. It is impossible for the orcs to capture Béantal Dol in six short months. But her visions have served us well so far. There is something wrong in Béantal Dol. It is like a fog of dread that clings to everything. I want my daughter to be born somewhere where she does not have to be afraid all the time. I want her to grow up in a place where she need never hear the drums at night.

I want to let you know that I will leave the city within the season. I am going to return to Tharunind. If you do want to continue to trade with the Marshfolk you will need to send someone else. I would like to formally present myself as a candidate to take over the aur gwaed trade with the mountains. I will be glad to trade with people who speak the true language, not a thousand year dead tongue nobody else understands. If I never hear the Marshfolk tongue again I will die glad.

Your son in blood
Coram Terayne
Who is found in Béantal Dol.

Translations from the Iaith

Pennaith: literally "head", we assume "chieftain".

Gwerin Morfa: "People of the Marsh"

Aur Gwaed: Lit. "Gold Blood" so we assume Ambergelt or possibly Orichalcum, given the context of it being a trade good.

Asgwrn Ddraig: Lit "Bone of the dragon" so we assume dragonbone.

Past Life Vision of Father Drakov of the Vor'azi as documented in Echoes of the Labyrinth.

Winter Solstice, 379YE

Father Drakov of the Vor'azi (Varushka)

Accompanied by Vanya Petrovich Straskovich (Varushka)

Drakov was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary came to in a chamber with several people discussing what to do about an orc invasion of their land. The people were two generals (one either a changeling or a cambion, one apparently unlineaged), a draughir artisan, and a mage (of whose lineage the visionary was not certain).

They referred to the visionary as a magister, and talked of plans to use Spring



magic to wash away what they described as the filth of the invading orcs. They were planning rituals that they wished to make permanent in effect, and had already sent another general with an army into Urizen, where she had raided for ilium.

The plan with using Spring magic was to effectively open the doors to the Spring realm and let its magic flow through the woods, killing all the invading orcs.

The others presented a choice to the visionary of whether to have the rituals performed now, or wait a little longer. If they performed them now, the rituals would work but they might not have full control over their effects; whereas if they waited, they would lose one of their cities (whose name started something like Bel Am), leaving thousands of refugees, and possibly allowing their entire civilisation to be destroyed. The visionary chose to wait and see, and the vision ended.

Drakov and Vanya both had their souls examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, both had a dedication to Vigilance with the strength of a single priest behind it, and Drakov also had a testimony of "Wise Counsellor" with the strength of a single priest.

After the vision, Drakov still had his dedication and testimony, but his soul was injured such that the echoes remaining of his past life felt more real to him than the present; he had to be persuaded to give an account of his vision by asking him to give a briefing as if he were his past self. An excommunication with the strength of a single priest was sufficient to seal the injury (along with his dedication), and an exorcism from a single priest removed the excommunication.

Vanya's soul appeared after the vision to look faded and weak, and Vanya himself seemed to be weak and confused as well. An exorcism with the strength of seven priests was sufficient to heal his soul.

There are no details in the vision of names, dates, or locations. However, the context of invading orcs and a civilisation dealing with them by flooding the surrounding area with Spring magic on such a large scale suggests that this could have occurred in one of the cities of Terunael. If this were the case the name "Bel Am" could have been a mishearing of "Beantal Dol", one of the Terun cities.

Past Life Vision of Father Drakov of the Vor'azi as documented in a letter to the Eternal Family of Navarr

I trust my letter finds you and the rest of the Eternal Family well. I have returned safely to the Grimhold. As promised I have put quill to paper to explain in as much detail as I can my True Liao Vision, along with my thoughts.

The vision

I came to in a room, standing at the head of a table, with several people surrounding it. They addressed me constantly as Magister, but did not use names for each other, rather titles.

Human Female - General

Sadly I did not catch the name of her army. Apparently her raid on Urizen was a success and emptied their vaults and treasury of all their Illium. Additionally her army were evacuating a besieged city. I did not catch all of it's name but it was Bel or Bal something. She wanted us to hold off on casting the ritual so they could evacuate more civilians.

Draughir Male – Artisan or Maker

He advised the safe haven was secure. We had evacuated many and there was room for more. He cautioned waiting, to allow any stragglers to reach safety before the ritual was cast. In his words, “what is the point of casting it now if we don't save enough of our civilisation so we survive?”

Changeling Male - General

He argued with the other General, believing it foolhardy to send more men to help a dying city. Apparently the orcs were not only at the walls but seizing them. The human general was convinced the other army would reach them in time to lend aid. However he warned we would lose more lives than we would save and might reveal the location of the safe haven.

Human Male - Magus

The ritual was ready and would be made permanent by the seized Illium. The Charter Stones were ready and primed to bring through the raw power of Spring to wash creation clear of the filth of the Orcs. I asked which tribe, to be told all of them. He confirmed it would spread out from our cities, I think he said there were seven. When I asked about safeguards and control of the magic, they all confirmed they were confident they would have full control. Sadly, they provided no details of how we would have control, other than the might

of our magic. We had, I was told already agreed the ritual must be cast; the question now was purely one of timing.

My aide advised me to call a vote. It was split between my four advisors, I had the casting vote. I said that rather than loose what we had gained through blood and sacrifice that we should shy never from the harder task. I ordered the casting of the Spring rite now.

My thoughts

- This is apparently the furthest back in time anyone has ever gone through the use of True Liao.
- As the 'seven great cities of our Empire' had a Charter stone to 'call through the power of Spring', it follows there are 7 Vallorn.
- The Magus advised the use of Illium would, constantly renew or fed the Spring magic. A Spring or perhaps Winter ritual with an equal or greater amount of Illium this would end this re-supply.
- There was a safe haven. My advisors were clear it was in the Bay of Catazar, rather than around it. Perhaps there is a fragment of the Terunael who survived and settled beyond the lands we know now. Or perhaps these survivors became the Navarr.

My Egregore is aware of what happened and will, at the Spring Summit, introduce me to your Egregores. I would appreciate it if you were present for this. Several Vor'azi and my brother in the Wardens of Semmerlak know what happened. They have been sworn to secrecy a have the Howling Pines who debriefed my Guide Priest while I was subject to a Spiritual Wound. The Captain has offered to protect my body should any Orc or Navarri seek revenge in this life for what I did in my previous one.

I would also appreciate a meeting with the Advisor on the Vallorn if you could arrange this. While I have written all I can recall, perhaps with prodding I may recall more. Until we meet at Anvil, I wish you and the Eternal Family well.

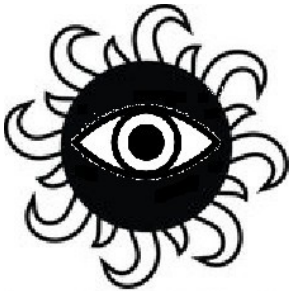
In Vigilance and friendship

Father Drakov

Ritual Text of The Arc of Skuld

Below is the text of the ritual The Arc of Skuld, a large-scale Winter curse provided by the Thule in discussions regarding the Vallorn. It provides insight into both the ritual itself and the people of Terunael, especially those of Emrys.

I have included faithful depictions of the imagery used in the document but I have chosen a more legible type face than the spiked calligraphy of ritual text itself. I will however also include a sample of the calligraphy after the main body of text.



Here is shown the Red Eye

Who is called also Ráfandimathur and Routhauger.

Who turns things awry.

Who is not what it is seen to be.

Who is the harbinger of fate and chaos.

Who is the guardian of Fate.

Who is the symbol of the unknown.

Whose place cannot be marked; only the signs of their passing.

The Red Eye alone goes where it will.

It cannot be tamed.

It cannot be gainsaid.

It does not ask permission.

It tangles even the plans of the Dragons.

It rules the sky and is without rules.

Where it pauses, it changes the shape of the skies.

It alone of all stars is single-natured.

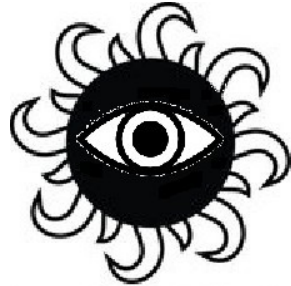
It stands alone yet not alone.

It is part of all things.

All things at their core are unknown.

It is the outcast who rules.

It is the star of ill omen.
Yet it is the star of opportunity.
The hunter shuns the red star.
It is inconstant; it is not to be followed.
The red star will lead you to the abode of horrors.
The red star will show you the path to doom.
The red star rules over the place of wings.
The red star fills the mammoths with rage.
When the red star rises the rusalka sing.
The warlock does not shun the red eye.
The warlock does not embrace the red eye.
Where it walks walks opportunity.
It lead the Dragons to the mountain.
It surmounts the great thrones.
It watches over the people of the north.
It is both gift star and plague star.

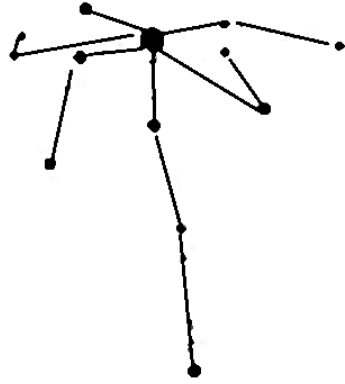




Here is shown the Dragon Throne
Who is called also Vithvarandir
Who endures all things.
Who resists the change from without.
Who is the warden of strength.
Who survives the Long Winter.
Who rises from the barren lands.
Who stands against the blizzard.

The Dragon Throne does not wither.
It gains strength as it endures.
It is the wall against the foe.
It is the shield of tradition.
It is the will to continue against the Night.
It is the fire that burns in the mountain.
It stands guard over the ways of the people.
The Dragon Throne is the power that preserves.
The guardian looks to the Dragon Throne
To grant strength to fight the vermin of the south.
The warlock looks to the Dragon Throne
To grant surety of purpose.
The Hunter looks to the Dragon Throne

The five Dragons rest enthroned.
They are the soul of the people.
They are the anchor of the past.
They are the beacon of the future.
They are the mountain and the sun.
They are like the stars.
The five Dragons endure.





These words exist because the Dragon Hinodir has decreed they should exist.

Let any who gaze upon them by stealth be blinded by the light of the heavens.

Let any who lays hand upon them without permission be struck with wasting sickness.

Let any who takes these words from their resting place be torn apart by chains of green iron and their shrieking soul hurled into the Abyss to be unmade.

The First Coming of the Vermin of the South

In the days long ago, the people lived on the plains north of the mountains. They lived in the forests south of the mountains. Yet the old scrolls say that a human people came to the forest south of the mountains. They came from far beyond the lands of our people, lands known only to She of the Bright Orb.

They spread through the forests. Sometimes these human people met with the true people. Sometimes the two peoples contended for land, or wealth, or slaves. Sometimes they traded for land, or wealth, or slaves. They had their own strange ways, and honoured human spirits, but they were careful, and clever, and wise enough not to raise the ire of the Five Who Sit Upon The Mountain Thrones.

And as the seasons turned, so there as battle and peace between the true people, and the people of the forest who dwelt in the shadows beneath the trees.

In time, however, new humans came, who we call the Vermin of the South.

They were not like the people of the forest. They were not wise and clever, but cruel and hard. They came in great numbers. They contended with all people the people of the forest and the true people. They came in time even so far as the foot of the mountains. They made war upon our people who lived in the forests as they did upon the humans.

In time, they came through the passes that lie to the east of the Traveler.

They came at first single-spy. Then in greater numbers. In time an army of the vermin of the south came from across the mountains. Their warlocks brought strange magic. Their warriors brought spears and shields of surpassing strength. They brought bloodshed and war.

The people resisted them and for a time they were held back. But then the voice of the Five spoke from the mountain. The Five spoke and said “We shall wait, We shall allow these creatures to come into our land. We will allow them to believe that they are strong. We will allow them to show us their weakness. We will allow the Winter itself to undo their design.”

The people did not question. They fell back before the advance of the intruders from the south. They came through Hahlerm – and pressed into Stathas and Kógur.

The vermin of the south began to lay down their camps, Through the spring and the summer. Then autumn came, and the leaves fell, and the wind began to blow. Then the winter came, and the first snows, and the intruders died as the frost stole into their hearts and froze their blood, They fell upon one another, desperate for food, and in their foolishness they cracked the door to the Walker of the Wastes and he fell upon them when the winds howled their harshest.

Then the first day of Spring came, as it always did in these days. The armies of the people closed their warding arc and spilled the blood of the invaders upon the thawing soil.

Those who did not die fled back across the mountains and the people of the forests met their weakness with chains and rope and spears.

Those who did not die, who did not flee, remained as servants of the People.

The Tear of Fire

A generation passed; a blink of an eye for Those Who Sit Upon the Thrones. A heartbeat for the Five who are One. Then came the time of the Red Tear the child of Routhauger that brought destruction and power.

The Will of the Dragons joined with the people to one end to guide the Tear-of-Fire and to reduce the damage that it would cause when it fell. It was their Will that the tear fall in Luhguren and their Will made manifest guided the tear to fall where they chose.

Yet as they turned their Will to this task, as every warlock worked to bind their will to the Will, the vermin of the south sensed that our focus was elsewhere. They sent scouts, who marked that we looked to the stars and not to the mountains. They waited, and they planned against us and the Tear-of-Fire fell where the Five commanded and the face of Sküld was remade - but not beyond recognition.



Trees still stood, the mammoths and the yaks still roamed the tundra. The people still lived although one sixth of them had fallen as the star fell. In time we would have rebuilt Sküld but we were not given our chance to do so, because of the treachery of the vermin of the south.

They took advantage of our momentary weakness, and surged forth to contest Sküld with us. They sent their hunters north to try and steal the bounty of the Crimson Tear, and their builders to Hahlerm, and Stashas, and Kógur to raise their burning sphere above the trees and make war upon us and even these many years later, our command of Sküld is incomplete.

The Second Coming of the People of the South

The vermin of the far south came again, in the time immediately after the fall of the Tear-of-Fire. They came in much greater numbers than before, and as the first thaw touched the soil of Sküld their armies came against us.

They came cautiously; their hubris leavened with fear. They came again through Hahlerm to Sarthas and there they stopped.

They threw up their own arc of spears and shields. They resisted the traps the people laid for them. And as Spring turned to Summer they began to build. A tower of enduring white granite and precious mithril, a symbol of their challenge to the Dragons.

And again the voice of the Five spoke. "We shall wait." they said. We shall allow these creatures to come into our land. We will allow them to believe that they are strong. We will allow them to show us their weakness."

So the people fell back again, and laid another arc of spears, and waited and watched.

As Summer turned to Autumn, the vermin of the south finished their tower and raised atop it a great sphere of polished orichalcum.

And then as the first sun of Winter rose in the east, the many lesser warlocks that had come with the armies of the distant south raised up their voices and their hands and they spilled their blood upon the cold earth and upon the stones of their tower and upon their golden sphere. They sang and chanted for five days and six nights. And on the morning of the sixth day as the first snow fell a great cry went up from the invaders and the golden sphere burst into light and a wave of heat, like the first sun of Spring, washed across Stathas

The Second Sun

The vermin of the south did not stop with a tower. Over the next year they built more towers both to live-in and to watch. They built tall walls of white granite.

They built a road south through the pass into the lands of the people of the forest.

They laid out farms and fields.

They raised temples to their ancestors.

They swarmed and bred like ants.

As they did so the people called out to the Thrones, saying “Who are these invaders that they may build, and breed, and swarm upon our lands? Who are these vermin of the far south who have raised a tower and set a second sun upon it in defiance of your Thrones?”

And the voice of the Five said only “Patience. Wait. Watch. This too is as we Will it.”

As the city of the invaders grew, we learned that they had paid passage-toll to the people of the forest so that more invaders may come north. And the people cried out to the Thrones saying “Let us punish the people of the forest. Let us fall upon them and take from them this passage-toll.”

But the voice of the Five again spoke saying “Patience, Wait. Watch. This too is as we Will it.”

At first the golden sun was weak but over time its strength increased. Where it touched the soil, it brought the life of Spring, and the fire of Summer, and the gold of Autumn.

The invaders laid out their farms and their fields and the soil was rich.

They raised golden grains such as the people had never seen.

They planted trees that bore strange fruit in colours rarely seen in the north.

They bred herds of sheep and cattle, and slaughtered them in their season, and feasted.

When Winter came the light of the sun diminished; the life it gave was lessened; yet even when the harsh winds blew from the North the snow fell lightly on Stathas, and on Hahlerm, and on Kógur. As the people wrapped themselves in cloaks of bear-fur, the vermin of the south walked abroad in cloaks of fine wool.

And as the first sun of Spring rose, they renewed the light of their golden sun and renewed it's life-giving touch.

And the Five on their Thrones in the great mountain waited, and they watched.

The War of the Sun



Generations passed. A handful of heartbeats for the Five who sit upon their Thrones. The invaders became complacent.

They sought to extend their control beyond the bounds of their city.

They found the people waiting for them. They found the arc of spears that lay across Keyursal and Luhguren, pointed toward their hearts. Spear and shield and shield and spear clashed and broke and ebbed and flowed.

For generations the Five had waited and watched and seen the weakness of the invaders. They saw their hubris. They saw that they judged the people to be weak. To be savages. They saw that the vermin of the south mistook the caution of the Five, and of their warlocks, for lack of strength.

They saw their pride had grown to eclipse their wisdom.



And the Five laid the stress of their regard upon the invaders.

Tahenon the Gyre, great in his wrath, walked with the warriors of the people, and smote the vermin of the south with lightning and thunder and punishing rain.

Night-Dark Fraynir, the one who waits, slipped through the shadows and wove curses of fear and despair against the children of the vermin.

Caridis Runebinder, speaker of the truth, wove the north winds into a shield and laid it between the people and the warriors sent by the vermin of the south,

Hinodir of the Bright Orb, who sees all, looked into the hearts of their warlocks and discerned their plans.

And Orobus the Chained, who brings and binds, brought allies from the realms and bound them to the aid of the people.

For all the vermin of the south had their warriors, and their lesser warlocks, they could not stand against the unbound wrath of the people and the Five who strode beside their in spirit and Will.

They were driven back to their city of Stathis, encircled by a ring of spears, and slowly and surely the people closed that ring of spears around their necks.

They cried out to their people of the far south, but no answer came.

They fought, but they were driven back again and again.

They stood upon their walls of white stone and looked out with terror upon the forest of our spears, and knew that they could not endure and that the punishment for their hubris was to be their absolute destruction.

The Sun Falls

In their hubris, in their knowledge that they were beaten, in their jealousy and spite, the people of the city of the golden sun raised

up their magic. They could not harm the People, for the Five protected them. They could not strike against the Five, for the People protected them.

So they turned their magic on themselves.

Rather than allow the People to claim their prize, they raised up their hands to Ráfandimathur and Routhauger, They called upon the Red Eye saying “Protect us! Raise a wall around our city! Are we not mighty? Have we not raised a second sun and brought eternal Spring to the lands of winter? Are we not more powerful than those who come against us, who have thrown a ring of spears around our city? Turn your eye upon us, oh walker in the sky, that we may show these orcs that our power is greater even that that of their Dragons upon their mighty Thrones.”

And the Red Eye looked down upon them.

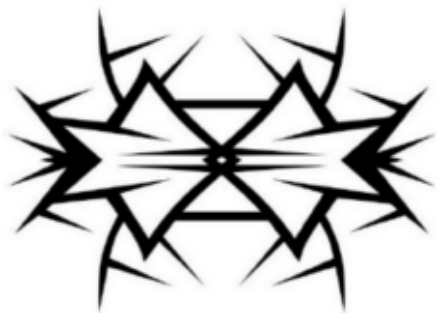
And their tower cracked.

And their sun fell.

The Coming of the Greenhunger

From the ruins of their tower, and their sun, the Greenhunger came. It rose as gyre of power possessed only of the urge To Be.

As the boiling water of the hot spring gathers and rises, sending a plume of fire against the sky, it came. Yet where the water of the hot springs falls back to the pool, ready to rise again, the tide of the Greenhunger did not ebb. It rose and rose and where it touched it tore down the city of the intruders.



And the Five upon their Thrones looked upon the folly of the invaders. They saw what they had unleashed in their hubris and their jealousy. They saw that

it was a hunger that could never be sated, a hunger even greater than that of He Who Walks Behind The Wind. They saw it rising, and growing, and in time consuming all the world.

The warlocks among the vermin of the south raised up their hands, and spilled their blood, and spoke their words of power but their magic was weak. At best they could slow the Greenhunger for a time, time enough for their cowardly flight south.

Yet the Greenhunger followed at their heels, washing over Hahlerm and beginning to spread its hungry tendrils to Kógur also.

And, as before, once their hold was broken, the invaders found the people of the forest waiting for those who fled, with ropes and spears. This time the people of the forest sought no passage-toll, and took any of the invaders who fell into their hands as slaves, or left them for the dark roots of the trees to feast upon. The vermin of the south had been arrogant, and their arrogance had offended the people of the forest just as it had offended the Five Who Sit Upon Their Mountain Thrones.



Yet apart from the weak magic of the intruders, the land itself rebelled against the touch of the Greenhunger. With the second sun shattered, and its tower broken, the winds of five generations blew down from the north bringing with them unseasonal snow and ice. And the Will of Caridis Runebinder flew with those winds, and the Will of Tahenon the Gyre roused them and wove them into a spear, and Night-Dark Fraynir stole the warmth from the land with the shroud of his Will.

And where the cold winds blew, the Greenhunger faltered and became sluggish, and its expansion slowed, and it fell to slumber. In this way was Kógur spared, although the thing could not be rooted from Stathis or Hahlerm.

The Five on their Thrones knew that the Winter would not last nor should it for eternal Winter would be a curse as terrible as eternal Spring but again it bought time for a true solution to be found.

And in the year that followed, the Five turned all their thought toward devising a solution.

Orobus the Chained sought out the cunning Grandfather Shadow, and the wise Grandmother Winter, and the knowledge of the King-of-Ruins, and the artifice of the Raiser-of-Walls and the Hammer-Forged-Flame.

And Hinodir of the Bright Orb called the warlocks to her Throne and set upon them the task of finding a way to contain the Greenhunger when the winter ended and Spring once again came upon the north.

The Great Warding

And so a great working was begun, to ward all the world against the Greenhunger.

First, guided by Orobus the Chained and by the wisdom of Grandmother Winter, and the artifice of the Raiser-of-Walls an Hammer-Forged-Flame, an arc of power was laid upon the land. Not an arc of spears but an arc of mithril woven with the Will of the Chained, to hold and channel the magic of the ward.

Then as the last sun of Winter set and the cold Red Eye rose, the Five bound their Will as One with their People and drew down the power of the stars of Year's Ending.

The Will of Caridis Runebinder carved the runes of protection into the land, and the Will of Takenon the Gyre gave strength to the People that they might burn like beacons beneath the cold stars, and the Will of Hinodir of the Bight Orb brought light to the warlocks so that they might see one another and work as one, and the Will of Orobus the Chained bound all the People as one, and the Will of Night-Dark Fraynir looked outwards through the eyes of his watchers to ensure none came unlookedfor to the place where all their Will was made manifest,.

Strengthened by the profligate gifts of Grandfather Shadow, and by sacrifice given to the King-of-Ruins, they placed a great ban upon the Greenhunger and upon all the land of Skuld.

And when the first sun of Spring rose the next morning, the Greenhunger slumbered, contained amid the ruins of the city of the Golden Sun, and to the path of fear the vermin of the south had forged for it as they fled back into the forest lands.

The Sacrifice

Yet the horror that the intruders had unleashed was a thing of the Red Eye, who some call the King-of-the-Hevens, and even the Five Unending must listen when the Red King speaks. And the Red King wove a ban upon the land and spoke to the Dragons saying “this thing is a promise, and an unanswered oath, and it lies within my eye.”

And unlike the intruders, unlike the vermin of the south, the Five are wiser than to draw the eye of the Ráfandimathur and Routhauger, who turns things awry, who is not what he seems to be.

So the Greenhunger remains, sleeping, in the ruins. And each generation the Five draw their Will together and again lay down the magic of their ban upon it, and upon all the land of Sküld .

And this is the nature of our sacrifice, that keeps the Greenhunger contained and prevents it devouring everything that lies south of the Ever-Frost. For the magic that ensures the Greenhunger slumbers means that Spring comes no more to the land of Sküld , and that Summer and Autumn instead become a single season of cold rain, and early snows, and sour soil.

Life finds little purchase in the soil of Sküld , and the seed quickens slowly.

The people who dwell in Sküld , who watch the Greenhunger, and the mountains of the south have fewer children than the tribes of the west, and their herds are smaller.

Yet still the people endure, through the will of their warlocks, who bring the blessings of the Five, the touch of Caridis Runebinder, to quicken the seed in its season and ensure there is sufficient food for all who need it.



Yet it is not the Will of the Runebinder that every farm and ever herd bear the mark of that touch. so that the people may prosper.

Those who wish to raise a family to the glory of the Five will travel the road toward the setting sun and dwell for a time in Nithoggir or Verthandi before returning with their children to rejoin their tribes and raise their offspring on the plains of Sküld .

We pay the price of our sacrifice willingly for one day we know that the Red King will speak again and say “The promise is fulfilled, and the oath answered, and I turn my eye elsewhere”.

And then the Five will send us forth again to destroy the Greenhunger and there will be no more need to lay their Will upon Sküld , and our people will claim the ruins the intruders

left behind and our land be whole again.

The Second Tear-of-Fire

The Greenhunger of Sküld slumbers.

Yet within a handspan of years since, a second Tear-of-Fire has fallen, a second Child-of-Ráfandimathur-and-Routhauger has been born, and a second time have the Dragons reached out their hands and decreed that it fall upon Sküld .

In time, one who as a far descendant of the vermin who wrought the Greenhunger was brought before the Throne of Chains, and spoke respectfully, and the one who sits upon the Throne inclined their head to him and listened to his petition. This one was named “Merel of the Far Forest” and while he was of the blood of the vermin, still the Five Who Sit Upon The Mountain Thrones heard his words.

And when the Tear-of-Fire fell from the heaven, and the people of the forest wove their magic at the Will of the Five, and sent it to fall upon Sküld, we stood at the boundary of Stathas and looked upon the Greenhunger so that we might tell this “Merel of the Far Forest” what occurred.

For five days and six nights, the skies over Sküld were shadowed in twilight.

The earth heaved, like the branches of a tree in a great storm.

The hills turned and rolled, and the trees were snapped from their roots.

Ash and hot embers fell as rain that burnt and scored the face of the land.

Yet after five days and six nights, the smoke and the fire quieted. The rains came, and the sky was cleared. For a time the rivers were choked with ash, but soon they ran clear again. The Dragons reached out, and laid their blessing upon the waters and with the power of the sign of the Dragon Throne, the waters ran pure and fresh and feeble as it is beneath the wards of Sküld the spark of life was protected.

The face of Sküld was changed, but not as much as the Memory says it was when the first Tear-of-Fire fell. Most of the forests still stood, although burnt by fire. The mammoths and the yaks still roamed the tundra. The people still lived for this time the Five were ready for the touch of Ráfandimathur and Routhauger, and had decreed the tribes of Skud withdraw to Vethandi and Nithoggir.

When the Tear fell, it scattered fragments of fire about itself, that fall upon the land. It rained fire and embers. These embers burned where they fell, and brought destruction.

Some of the shards of fire fell upon Stathas. Where they struck, they burned away the body of the Greenhunger. Yet for all their heat the fires burned fitfully. And within hours new growth, and the choking breath of the Greenhunger flowed back. Within days the harm done to the Greenhunger had



been replenished. Within weeks, it seemed as if the places where the fire had burned were more green, and more savage than they had been previously, and the beasts that serve as the hands and eyes of the Greenhunger gathered close around.

The Dragons teach us that when the Greenhunger is hurt it grows back more furious than before, which is why we are patient, and watch, and wait for it to show its weakness just as its progenitors did so many turnings of the sky ago.

Sample Thule Calligraphy

These words exist because the Dragon

Hinodir has decreed they should exist.

Let any who gaze upon them by stealth be

blinded by the light of the heavens.

Let any who lays hand upon them without
permission be struck with wasting sickness.

Let any who takes these words from their
resting place be torn apart by chains of green
iron and their shrieking soul hurled into the

Abyss

to be unmade.



Research Notes from Mourning Hollow, Hercynia

While the mystery of Mourning Hollow was one of a time after the fall of Terunael there were items and ruins of the ancient empire present that provided snippets of insight into the past. For a more detailed account of more of the history of Mourning Hollow please consult the book published by Garth of Renwaerd and Skywise Gralka.

Initial Thoughts by scholars at the Darkhaven Wayhouse:

The area where Mourning Hollow now dwells was once a large Terunael settlement. Not too far a travel from Hacynia, the ancient city at the heart of what we now call Hercynia. It was famed for its learning and contained a Day college and library that was dedicated to the Eternal Phaleron.

The architecture of the area was so impressive that it was often referred to as the temple of Phaleron, although there is no evidence of any ceremonial function of this place.

Several reports show that although Terun is ancient, it survived the fall of the Empire mainly intact and was in use by the Navarr, probably one of the largest inhabited areas in the region. It would probably be worth noting that if anywhere was to explain what happened with the Vallorn, then the one Terunal library that survived the destruction of their Empire is probably a good place to start.

Ghosts are often in the clearing around the Regio that remains and it looks like it was once the site of much fighting between the Navarr and the Vard. We have little historical records of this however, but the Navarr ghosts will generally speak to people and they seem to be trapped in that time. Just avoid the ghosts of the Vard, they will attack the Navarri on sight. The ghosts have told us that this library was torn down by the Vard and they tried to defend it but it was set ablaze.

This doesn't tell the whole story though, since there is obviously something that happened after the war with the Vard that happened to the temple that the ghosts don't know about.

We know now that the area was part of a powerful regio, one that improved the casting of knowledge based Day magicks, although interestingly that regio is only linked to the realm of Day during the daylight hours. It would be interesting to find out more about it at nighttime, however that is too dangerous with the ghosts.

The regio itself will reduce the magnitude of the casting of 'Skein of Years', 'Bright Lantern of Ophis' and the 'Celestial Library' by two! This is a very powerful regio and I have not heard of anything reducing magnitude before. This means that with the third magnitude of Day lore you could cast Skein of Years mastered with only three mana crystals. There is also a powerful night effect obscuring something in that regio.

Skein of Years Visions from Terunael Locations and Items:

Temple of Phaleron

The marble pillars and remains of walls that were once a great library.

Terunael artisans work tirelessly and meticulously building an impressive structure. Stone walls and wooden shelves stacked high with countless tomes. In the centre of the library sits the regio and a large wooden table its surface adorned with carved swirling patterns. Bloodstains fill these twisting paths, the surface of the table having been used again and again by vates..

Vard soldiers come. Without mercy they attack the library. Seventeen ropes are used to topple the pillars as the seventeen stars of the constellation of the great wrym hang in the sky above. Everything burns.

Golden Bowl of Phaleron

An ancient covenstone

Mage putting welt silver in bowl, casting celestial library bowl in the middle of the library

There is a hole in the roof, a circle where the sun light pours through and down onto the bowl

There is fire, the temple is burnt, a vard warrior kicks the bowl, it bounces off a pillar.

It lays there in ashes on the floor.

You feel the library watches you

Navarri Candlesticks

A pair of wooden candlesticks with swirling vines carved on their surface.

A changeling works diligently, carving the wood as a young draughir looks on with a look of adoration. The work takes days, far longer than it should as the pair lose themselves in one another and in their surroundings. Whispered conversations are held and their love for one another grows.

The candlesticks come to sit on the shelves of an old library, illuminating shelves upon shelves of old books. The library holds other decorations that hint to its Terunael heritage.

Heavy boots stomp through rubble and ashes. A warrior in mail loots the candlesticks from the remains of what had once been the Temple of Phaleron.



Terunael Plate

An old dinner plate owned by Darkhaven standing kept in good condition for its age.

Bread and cheeses sit on the plate and goblets of wine are shared. A small group share a meal and grumble in hushed tones. They aren't happy being in Hercynia, it's just as bad as it was on previous visits. They find comfort in the fact that they will soon be returning to Beantal Dol.

"If it's in Hercynia they'll put blood on it anyway" one of the travellers utters, seeing the locals as little more than the Ushkan barbarians. They won't be here for long however they have only come to deliver news. Orcs have been spotted in the south. Two score and in family groups, they think it should be fine.

Beantal Dol will not fall.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH INTO STAR

COMPATRIOT OF NAVARR AND THORN

Commissioned by Sian Eternal and completed in Summer 381YE

Sian Eternal,

My apologies for the brevity of this letter, however, I hope the exciting proposition that is contained within it will make up for the lack of information on the one that is known as Star.

I have tried to find what information I can about the one known as Star, as you are probably aware, the most common reference are to her are Star-Sworn Legacies, the combination of Green Iron Axe and Dragonbone Rod that can be made by our artisans. The artisans of Treji (before they were taken by the Thule) used to make these items under the stars telling stories of her deeds. I have tried to track down some of these stories, but it seems that all those who knew of her deeds are with the group of Runesmiths who are still in captivity or slain by the Thule. Of all the artisans taken, Eirwen Stones Rest is said to be the most adept at making Star-Sworn Legacies and could probably tell more of Star's story if she was found. Stone's Rest steading is a small group of Artisans who were formed from Grey Stone striding just before Ethan Grey Stone travelled south to Miaren to form Snow's Thaw striding leaving Drusta Grey Stone to stay in Hercynia to keep Winter's Vigil.

What few records there are about Star, are that she was a powerful vate who was believed to be the daughter of a powerful magister. We have tried to find information about the magisters of Seren, and it seems that her father had travelled from a different city, one to the south east, as far as we are aware in Axos lands.

Whilst investigating Star's father, we have potentially found some leads that point toward the unnamed Terunael city in Axos. The city is an enigma – even its existence was just conjecture until very recently. If you use your power as an Advisor to commission us to investigate that city, the normal 5 throne fee would be enough for us to visit the Towers of Kantor and to supply a small expedition into the Vallorn there to see if we can discover more.

While we could simply head to Axos, it would be better if you could secure permission from the Axou – I would suggest speaking to the Imperial Ambassador to Axos – who I believe is an Urizen called Tarquinius of

Ankarien. Even if he simply informs the Axou we are coming that should smooth our way.

What is known about Star is that she was one of the first to set up home in Sanctuary Falls (now called Rhonwen's Fall) and set up a fortified steading behind the falls there. There are little other records about Star. Looking at Imperial Records, there are a few mentions. One is coincidentally a record of Badden Eternal, the then Spring Archmage. From rule of Empress Aenea, who was researching the life of Star before placing a declaration into conclave (and a similar motion was passed by the senator for Miaren) that there was no benefit to the Empire for looking into such a matter.

This declaration was passed with an overwhelming majority, but was the last motion that the Archmage made since that same conclave session there was a declaration of sorcery placed upon them. The declaration failed but the Archmage soon stepped down from their position.

There was a similar declaration made by Enys Weirstone – the first Grandmaster of the shuttered lantern – in the rule of Empress Marlika that finding records of Star should not be a priority in recapturing the history of the Empire.

The last time a request to find information out about Star was placed into Conclave, Empress Deanna used her veto to stop the research going ahead.

I am sorry that we could not find more information on Star for you. As my esteemed colleague, Albus Thornspire, wrote in the last research that he collated:

“There are records that Star returned to Sanctuary Falls several times and it is even thought that she died there, although any investigation into her life from the falls has been met with resistance from the Navarr over that time. It is unknown why, although it is more recently claimed that all records from her life have been lost”

May we walk in the Path of Wisdom always,

Aili Marajasdottir

Icewalker

NOTES ON THE EXPEDITION TO AXOS

Siân Eternal, Advisor on the Vallorn, commissioned Ellian Sweetwater - a civil servant with the department of historical research - to travel to Axos after the Autumn Equinox 381YE. Ellian travelled with a small group of companions, and visited the Towers of Kantor with the support of both the Ambassador to Axos, Tarquinius of Ankarien, and the Axou advisor on foreign affairs Ilarch Maxatious. They were to investigate the descendants of the people of Terunael in Axos, but her travels took her much further afield. What follows is their account of their time in Axos.

The document is in two parts - the first part focuses on the vallorn of Visokuma, also called the Cavan vallorn. The second part focuses on the follow-up investigation into the whereabouts of certain descendants of the Terunael people in Axos.

A third part has been included to document what happened to Ellian Sweetwater following their sabbatical and journey into the Mountains of the Moon.

PART ONE

A Report from the Forest of Visokuma For Siân Eternal the Advisor on the Vallorn

It has been a long three months. I am going through my notes, marveling at how far we have come. Collecting my thoughts while torrential rain pounds against the canvas above my head. Back home, it would be a cold Winter night but here... here the nights are warm. Warmer than Therunin, heavy and humid and oppressive. It is hard to sleep, even without the constant sounds of the forest beasts. Forest? Jungle more like – but with the abhorrent fecundity of the vallorn it is sometimes hard to be certain.

To Axos

We left Crown's Quay shortly after the Autumn Equinox on the black sailed vessel “*Grace of Kantor*” as guests of captain Hristina Vezantios. South through the Bay of Catazar in the company of two Highborn vessels – together for safety from the Grendel pirates that prey on Axou vessels as eagerly as they prey on Imperial ships. Then west, and north along the forbidding coast of unknown lands. The captain was vague about what lies along these shores – orcs and monsters and the arid desert of Xira.

The journey to the *Towers of Kantor* was long, and tedious, and uneventful. I spoke with the captain, and with several of her crew, about what waited at our destination. They were happy enough to speak of politics and the doings of the citadels – how the *Gates of Ipotavo* had recovered since the Druj invasion, how there was work underway to rebuild the *Tunnels of Kaban* in the west. Of disputes between Ipotavo and the *Chamber of Issyk* over their respective attitudes to the Empire – Ipotavo unsurprisingly favours the Empire, while Issyk argues that Axos would be better served to ally with the Grendel. Of the enthusiasm of the Grand Ilarch of Kantor for trade with distant Jarm and wealthy Sarcophan. Of the fourth citadel, the *Halls of Maykop*, they spoke little save to say that it was a place of learning and wisdom.

Of the vallorn, and of their ancient history they either could not or would not speak. Confirmation that there is indeed a vallorn in Axos, and a few tantalising comments about the Sorceror-Kings who founded the nation and built the citadels. But on the subject of Terunael they were silent. Were there ruins in the heart of the vallorn? I would have to speak to scholars, not sailors.

Impressions of Kantor

Kantor itself is impressive. You must have heard the citadels described as League cities where the buildings are piled one atop the other? It does not do Kantor justice. Great sprawling docks to rival the quays of Sarvos, and great urban sprawl built covering the foothills beneath the sky-scraping mountains of southern Axos.

The Axou call the place the Towers of Kantor and it is easy to see why – almost every structure we saw in the city was three or four storeys high, many much taller. They leaned against one another, and great sweeping stone bridges connected them one to another creating a twisted maze on many levels. Amid the towers and the bridges are grand viaducts and three great aqueducts that bring water from the mountains – rivers in the sky - a wonder of the world! White granite is everywhere here – Kantor controls some of the richest deposits of that material in the world. It is said that some wealthy citizens spend their entire lives without once setting foot on the ground, though I would wager that is fancy rather than fact.

The people are an odd combination of sobriety and exuberance. Their clothing is almost uniformly dark, and funereal in aspect. Yet there are splashes of colour everywhere – in the delicate jewelled pins they wear in their hair, in the

rings and medals they adorn themselves with, in the banners and even in the graffiti that covers many of the stone walls – often in places it is inconceivable a human can reach without scaffolding.

The hills above the city are pocked with entrances to labyrinthine tombs, guarded by both the living and the dead, where lie the ancestors of Kantor - and where the ghosts of sorcerers and merchants alike can be found. Yet it is only the poorest who are interred in the hill-tombs. The revered dead are interred in chambers beneath the city. Yet the weight of the towers means that unlike other cities (so we are told), the dead are stacked one-below-the-other in great vertical mausoleums that delve as deep into the earth as the towers of the living reach into the sky. Sepulchre after sepulchre stretching down, down, down into the rock beneath the city linked by narrow passages as the towers are linked by bridges. Its in these chambers that the living go to speak with the dead. I questioned this a little, and all those I spoke to told the same tale. The dead are ever-present for the Axou. They speak of their dead forbears with reverence, but this is not simple ancestor worship. The dead are ever present. It is no minor matter, but many citizens recounted tales of seeking the wisdom of the dead by speaking to the spirits of those who had gone before in the catacombs, or in the mausoleums and shrines that stand side-by-side with the shops and apartments and rich estates.

Two things stay with me about Kantor. The first is the smell – it is like nothing I have encountered before. It is the smell of a city, surely, of unwashed bodies and refuse and the stink of sewers. Yet that smell is overlaid with the strong, almost overpowering, smell of spices and of myrrh. Incense is burnt everywhere, both for the mundane purpose of masking the stench of the busy city, and as a memorial to the dead. In Kantor, they mourn those who have passed from life into the Labyrinth, and express sorrow that they will forget themselves and be lost forever to reincarnation and the cruelty of the creator. Even the birth of a child can be a sombre experience, in Kantor, for it is a reminder that someone who once lived a full life has been reborn as a mewling baby, forced to begin again.

Then there is the eerie green light that comes at night. Kantor it seems rarely sleeps. Day and night alike, they busy themselves at the business of acquiring more wealth for themselves and their extended families. The transition from day to night is marked only by the unveiling of dim lightstones across the city – some peculiarity of the local rock means that almost all the lightstones in Kantor glow green. Indeed, where poorer citizens hang torches or lanterns they often place them behind panes of green tinted glass in echo of the green light.

At sunset and sunrise, great leaden bells toll in towers and belfries across the city. The largest, which rests atop the tower-palace of the Grand Ilarch, tolls first and last. People pause in their business, and listen to the bells toll, and then continue as if nothing has happened. I was told that the bells are rung to remind everyone that time is passing, that the hours of their lives are slowly draining away like sand through the hourglass, and as a reminder of all those generations that have gone before. Macabre, and sobering.

Of History

For the first few nights in Kantor we stayed at the Imperial embassy. It was a little cramped, but at least familiar. The diplomats there have adopted the Kantoran (Kantorian? Kantorn?) clock, living and working in three overlapping shifts so that the embassy is open at all times. They reported that the citizens are cautiously friendly – neither suspiciously enthusiastic nor rudely standoffish. There was some talk of a Jarmish embassy, and of a major presence of Sarcophan representatives occupying several levels of one of the grand towers that stand at the heart of the city.

According to my fellows, there is some growing interest in the vallorn and the wisdom of the Navarr. The Axou, it seems, largely ignore the green horror that lurks at the heart of their nation. They pick around its edges, and bemoan the fact that the great wealth of the interior is denied to them. Even before our arrival there were invitations waiting for us to visit some of the mercantile families of Kantor to talk about “ways to free the wealth of the vallorn”. We declined them all – they felt more political than scholastic in nature. After we had settled in, however, we were invited to visit with Ilarch Maxatious, who advises not only the Grand Ilarch of Kantor but those of the other three citadels as well. He is a thin, pale man with a neat goatee beard and dark eyes that sparkle with a grim, mordant humour. His welcome was warm and professional, and he was at great pains to ensure we felt welcome and were well treated.

He had arranged a small banquet in our honour – ourselves, several civil servants and expatriate Imperial citizens, and a double handful of Axou from influential families in Kantor. There was also a woman I was very keen to meet – Istacia of Maykop, an apparently well-known and respected historical scholar who has made something of a study of the history of the vallorn.

History of the Axos vallorn

Istacia of Maykop bears her age well. She makes no bones about the fact she was born in 287YE, but even allowing for her changeling blood she is remarkably youthful for a woman of ninety-four summers. She travelled here from Maykop by sea, and grumbled often about the journey, and the seasickness that plagued her trip.

I apologised, but she waved it away. It is easier to get to the vallorn from Kantor than Maykop, she said, and anyway she doubted I would find the Halls as exciting a place to visit as the rich city of Kantor. To hear her talk – with a mixture of love and gentle mockery – where Kantor is a bustling centre of industry and trade, the Halls of Maykop are a tomb – just one where some of the inhabitants have not quite accepted that they are dead yet. I think she was mostly joking.

She is a *necromantia* – a practitioner of ritual magic that deals with the spirits of the dead. We talked about the topic in vague terms only – she is an adept at raising and communicating with ghosts and it is with their aid that she and her peers study the history of Axos. I confess to being particularly intrigued by her accounts of objects she called *lekythoi* – urns specially prepared by artisans that preserve the ashes of scholars and important individuals so that their ghosts can be more easily reached by necromantia. Istacia claimed that it was through one of these lekythoi she had actually spoken with the shade of someone who had lived at the time the vallorn overwhelmed Terunael! She cautioned me that what she had learned was unlikely to make me happy, and urged me to remember that these events happened centuries ago long before the formation of the Empire. To her credit she seemed perhaps a little ashamed of what she had to tell me.

Of Cavan and its fall

The Terunael came to Axos last, Istacia said. They were already well established in the bay but they were drawn here by the wealth of Axos. The citadels already stood, and the Sorcerer-Kings had long since transcended mortality, but the Axou were merely a shadow of their current glory.

They came by land, she said, from the north-east, down through Kabanja. At first they came as merchants, seeking trade routes for their cities of Béantal

Dol and Tharunind. When they saw the wealth of Axos, however, they coveted it for themselves. The people of Béantal Dol and Tharunind made war on Axou, overwhelming them with magic and steel. In the end they threatened to unleash powers the Axou feared – powers of Spring that would devour the bones of the ancestors on which all the citadels were built.

A treaty was signed, and land ceded to the Terunael. They built a city on the edge of the rich forests of Visokuma – central Axos – and named it Cavan. The Grand Ilarchs chafed under this enforced peace, but they lacked the resources to oppose the Empire of Terunael. They would not risk the spirits of the hundreds and thousands who had evaded the Creator's cruel Labyrinth.

Istacia interrupted her narrative here to explain that the threats of the Terunael would be less effective today. In the centuries since, the necromantia had taken great pains to build permanent wards over the catacombs, mausoleums, ossuaries, and tombs that would defend against the threat of the hungry power of Spring. At the time, however, the Terunael threat was very real – a threat to the very foundation of what it meant to be Axou.

For a century and a half, the Terunael built Cavan amid the great weirwood forests at the heart of Axos. The Axou paid tribute to the Terunael, but they also learned from them how to build their citadels even larger. The three aqueducts of Kantor, said Istacia, were originally based on a design the Terunael used to bring water to Cavan, and with innovations such as these the Axou were able to grow their citadels to a size many had never dreamed of.



In the end, though, things began to go awry. The orcs of the Mallum attacked the roads that connected Béantal Dol and Tharunind to Cavan. They pressed south into Kabanja, threatening Kaban, Soloha, and Ipotavo. The Axou called to the Terunael of Cavan to aid them, in accord with their treaties, but the inhabitants of the city refused. The treaties were cast aside. The Grand Ilarchs of Issyk, Malykop, and Kantor came to the aid of their fellows and a terrible war raged. The orcs were held but it was only a matter of time before they ruined the three western citadels.

Some Terunael warriors disobeyed their leaders, however, and came to the aid of the Axou. They helped to keep the orcs at bay. They earned the respect of the people of the citadels. This served them in good stead when the catastrophe occurred.

There was some warning – the Terunael had withdrawn into their city and prepared a great work of magic. The Grand Ilarchs watched with great trepidation. Then, horribly, a great power bloomed in the centre of Cavan and raced like water along an aqueduct to all parts of the forest of Visokuma. It was unfettered life, an all-consuming force of abhorrent fertility and fecundity that drove the forest mad. Terrible creatures rose in Cavan and began to devour the people. The trees of the forest warped and twisted into unnatural shapes. The air itself became heavy with death and decay. The people of Cavan tried to flee before the madness they had unleashed.

Here Istacia became sombre, and ended our discussion for the evening. That night I was plagued by nightmares, I confess, of lurid green lanterns and writhing vines, and shambling vallornspawn husks clambering up the stairs of the embassy tower to devour me.

When we took our tale up again, Istacia spoke a little haltingly. She was not proud of what she recounted, unsurprisingly.

The Axou were angry, she explained. When they had called out to the Terunael for aid against the orcs they had been refused, ignored, denied. Instead, the people of Cavan had unleashed madness in the heart of Visokuma, twisting the forest and its bounty – the bounty they had stolen from the people of Axos.

When the Terunael fled Visokuma they were turned back. Those who would not go back into the hell of Cavan were slain, and their bodies reduced to dust. Only those few who had stood alongside the Axou against the orcs of the Mallum were spared – and many of them fought to try and defend their people and were regretfully killed by their prior allies. In recognition of their aid, a small handful were allowed to leave Axos, heading north and west through the Mallum in a desperate trek to try and reach Béantal Dol or the shores of Tharunind. The Axos assume they were taken by the Druj before they reached the heart of Terunael.

A very few of the survivors of Cavan – those who had fought to defend Axos, or who had come from families of blended Terunael and Axou blood, or had

been shown mercy and given succour by those more gentle, were brought into the citadels.

In Kantor and Issyk, some survivors were given a different choice – turn back to the vallorn or become slaves. Some chose to die rather than serve, but it is recorded that as many as a thousand survivors became slaves of the Axou they had previously disdained. Over time, as the practice of slavery fell out of favour, the descendants of these slaves became free citizens of Axos or left the nation in pursuit of their own destiny.

In the end, regardless of how they survived, the children of Cavan met one of two fates. Most disappeared into the blood of Axos, leaving behind the memory of Terunael and being Axou in all things. Their blood mingled with the blood of the Sorcerer-Kings, and they are simply Axou. A small handful of families maintained some of the traditions of Terunael-in-exile, working to try and discover a way to reclaim Cavan. Today they are gone as well – they lived in Soloha which was destroyed by the Empire in the reign of Emperor Nicovar.

For my part, once Istacia had completed her lecture, I shared with her what is commonly known about the cities in the west. Some of this was known to her, but much of it was new. She was fascinated to learn that Béantal Dol was lost to our memory as Cavan was, and to hear of Miaren, Liathaven, Brocéliande, and Therunin. She cursed her old bones – she would not countenance a trip to the Empire but it was clear she greatly desired to look on Seren at the very least.

Her story was grim, but she told it dispassionately, and truthfully as near as I can tell. It seems likely that she has only one side of it, but I have expressed it here as clearly as I can from my notes and memory.

The Axos and the Vallorn

After discussion with Istacia, I also spent some time speaking to Ilarch Maxatious. He had little interest in the history of Visokuma, but a great deal of interest in the vallorn. To him, and to the Grand Ilarch of Kantor, it represents a lost opportunity. The taint of the vallorn keeps them out of the woodlands, but they represent a vast source of untapped wealth. Not only are there potentially great reserves of ambergelt, dragonbone, and beggar's lye in Visokuma but there is apparently a great forest of weirwood trees.

We know from the liberation of Miaren and Therunin that the Vallorn does not taint Weirwood trees. The great forest spoken of a thousand years ago, that

Istacia says brought the Terunael here in the first place, almost certainly still exists – but choked by the miasma and crowded with husks and abominable spawn.

There have been attempts to destroy the vallorn in the past, of course, but they have been fruitless. The Axou quickly discovered what the Navarr already know – that even fire will not permanently harm a vallorn infestation. That while the spawn may be slain, they are numberless and any that are not killed dead quickly recover and return more savage than ever. That the air itself brings death and makes fighting in an infested area next to impossible. Unlike the Navarr, the Axou had no great vow to drive them. In the end, said Maxatious, the Nikitis Axou simply gave up trying to find a solution to the Vallorn, and turned their efforts to keeping it contained.

Some attempts were made to use magic to destroy the Vallorn. They had some luck with a ceremony that the Ilarch vaguely referred to as the “Invocation of the Throne of Maykop” which apparently “weakens” the vallorn when it becomes “too aggressive” but he was loathe to provide any detail. From reading between the lines, it involves a significant force of Axou warriors and magicians escorting necromantia from the Halls of Maykop into the forest itself to a certain location where a powerful Winter ritual is used to make the vallorn quiescent.

In the end, a series of fortifications were built around the boundaries (in Kabanja and Thronaskoni), and garrisoned by troops charged with destroying any spawn that pressed out of the tangled depths. And then the Axou simply ignored it except on those rare occasions where it tried to expand beyond the borders of Visokuma. There are apparently treaties between all the citadels that if the vallorn becomes aggressive, they will temporarily put aside any ongoing disputes until such time as the threat is ended.

Venturing into Visokuma

Entering the Vallorn was no small undertaking. We used our funds carefully but they were barely sufficient to acquire guides, some guards, oxen, and supplies for a month-long trip. In the end Ilarch Maxatious offered some assistance, providing a unit of Agema from his own household, and using his influence to secure us good prices for our provisions. I initially was cautious about his aid but he dismissed my concerns – he said to think of it as an investment. If our expedition convinced the Empire to share its lore of the vallorn with Axos, in the long run it would bring prosperity to the nation – and especially to the Towers of Kantor.

It took us the better part of a fortnight to travel the road that winds through the hills and across the plains of Thronaskoni to the fortification built on the edge of the Visokuma forest – on the boundaries of the Vallorn itself. The road mostly exists for transporting supplies and troops to and from the castle, and to service a handful of farms and villages along the route.

Once we were away from the coast, the weather became increasingly warm and uncomfortable, and it rained much of the time. This was typical of the season, our Agema captain informed us, and another reason that posting to the castle on the edge of Visokuma was considered a poor one.

The castle itself was impressive enough – perhaps the size of the Silent Sentinel in Casinea – a reminder that the Towers of Kantor have easy access to great quantities of white granite. The garrison commander did not seem particularly pleased to see us – I think that had we not been bearing documents under the seal of the Grand Ilarch of Kantor she would have turned us away.

She cautioned us repeatedly not to “stir things up” in Visokuma. The vallorn had been “feisty” of late – for the last month or so in fact – and she was concerned that this presaged another excursion by the abhorrent beasts that dwelt in its heart. Already, she said, there were reports of unfamiliar white flowers growing on the plains to the south and unsubstantiated stories of “odd pods” growing in some of the fields to the north which she seemed to take as a personal affront. In the end though she allowed us to pass through the castle, and travel west into the forest.

It is... even now, actually inside Visokuma – inside the Cavan vallorn – it is hard to put the place into words. It is warm, and it is wet – a little like Therunin in high summer but more so. It rains – a lot. The plants are exotic, unfamiliar, brightly coloured flowers are everywhere but here and there, like a discordant note in a song, something known, familiar, unexpected – a beggarwood tree, perhaps, or a stand of mangrove trees that would not be out of place in the Tarn valley.

There is a lot of water here, but we encountered no rivers – only pools and lakes, and the streams that run between them. There are insects – the forest teems with them – some familiar many much less so. I have seen thumb sized-hornets and vicious wasp-like terrors the size of dogs in the same hour. Shiny black beetles with spiked shells as large around as dinner plates, and swarms of pale white ants as long as my little finger that preyed on them. One of the guides – a woman who had visited the forest on no less than three previous occasions – put her hand down on a wet log to steady herself and was bitten

by... something.. the scuttled quickly away. Within ten minutes she was dead, her flesh sloughing from her bones like boiled meat. Within a handful of minutes she began to stir – but we all know what had to be done. Our Axou companions – those familiar with the vallorn at least – took steps. They did so with heavy hearts – those who fall to the vallorn do not return to the citadels, and rest beneath the ground there. They do not become honoured ancestors, they are not awoken to speak with their descendants. I understand a little more of why the Axou fear the vallorn, and ignore it as much as they can.

The insects are not the only threat here. There is a species of pitcher plant here that grows to great size, and possesses a long fibrous tendril with which it scoops birds and large insects out of the air. The long tendril is whip fast, and the end is covered in a sticky, paralysing sap. On the second day out, I strayed too near one. The last thing I remember was a noise like a thunder clap, and then the ground rose to meet me and darkness swallowed me. Had I been alone I doubt I would have been alive today, but luckily my companions were able to drag me to safety. I doubt the thing could have actually pulled me into its sticky pitcher, but the surviving guide spent a night gleefully explaining that the plants repeatedly strike at larger animals – or humans – until they are dead then wait for the flesh to begin to rot before slicing strips of decaying meat off with their tendril and dropping them into their insides. He claimed the things can move, pulling themselves along slowly through the forest, so that one can never be sure quite where they will be encountered. I think he was joking.

The *miasma*, of course, hangs over everything. It pools in hollows and over the streambeds, visible in the air as a light green fog. I have rarely seen it so thick – perhaps in the heart of Brocéliande when I was a girl. The Axou are aware of *green lung* – and take precautions against it. They called it *Kantor's Jest*. Nobody laughs.

We had only one encounter with vallornspawn husks; the precautions and additional oil of *blackthorn* we had brought with us served us in good stead. Our guides said that such encounters were uncommon – and rare along the edges of the forest. Most of the places where the vallornspawn are found are known and avoided, and we were not near one. They did not try to hide their concern.

The Ruins and the Scrying Eye

In the end, we were forced to turn back long before we reached the heart of the forest or the ruins of Cavan. In honesty, it is hardly surprising. Competent as the guides and Agema were, the Axou are no Navarr. There are no steadings here, and no safe places to camp. We quickly decided not to press our luck.

There was a ruin, however, that the guides said was not too far from the edge of the forest. It took us two days to reach it, and it was in all honesty a little disappointing. I would say that it had once been a watchtower – probably intended by the Terunael to keep an eye on the Axou of Thronaskoni. It was undeniably Terunael in origin, overgrown with the green kudzu of the vallorn's embrace. There was also a moss-covered stone with an inscription and the remains of a spiralling design. Time had worm most of it away, but I could make out the odd letter here and there.

It was a mournful place, one that settled into my spirit and filled me with sorrow. A symbol of the tragedy of Terunael. Of all that has been lost, and that we will never recover. We will never know who built this tower, or what the inscription on this stone was, or what became of the final guardians of this place. Did they die fighting to protect their fleeing neighbours from the vallorn, unaware that they were saving them from one dark fate only to condemn them to another at the hands of the Axou? Or did they flee before the green tide, and die on Kantoran spears?

Regardless; the trip was not wasted. While the guides warned we should not linger too long, we broke out our prismatic ink and tempest-jade bowls, and performed a scrying. It seemed as good a place as any. Under the watchful eyes of the Agema, we wove the design for our magic, and looked out across Visokuma.

It was breathtaking. A great pool of vibrant, deep green, shot through with currents of blood red. There are no trods here. There have never been any trods here. If Brocéliande is a wellspring of the vallorns might, this place is like an inland sea – like one of the bottomless mountain lakes of Hercynia. It is deep beyond measuring. It has never been tamed, and its power has never been diminished. It has been tended – there are marks of this “Invocation of the Throne of Maykop” that Maxatious spoke of – and the presence that underlies the power of the vallorn seems somnolent. Slumbering power, not watchful or bitter like some of the vallorn to the west.

But it is a vallorn. It is a vallorn that has possessed the entire forest of Visokuma for a thousand years, one that has never known the tread of a striding or the watchful eyes of a steading.

There was one other thing that we noticed as we wove our magic – an absence. There is an absence near the heart of the vallorn large enough to register as something of note to our scrying eyes. Given everything Maxatious said, and the recounting of Istacia, I would guess that what we are seeing is the largest weirwood forest I have ever heard of – larger than the Golden Trees of Seren. It is possible that this forest is in some measure responsible for the eerie restfulness of the vallorn of Cavan, but that is entirely speculation on my part – an instinct, based on nothing concrete. Miaren was the first of the vallorn to fall after all, and perhaps there is some resonance in the sap of the weirwood trees that gentles or weakens the vallorn. They are largely untouched by its taint, after all.

Shortly after our ritual was complete, the guides became anxious and insisted we move. There were noises in the woods – something large crashing through the trees. One of the Agema said “it is a bear” but she looked away as she did so, and she was afraid.

Conclusion

I have discovered nothing new about Star, I am afraid. But I have confirmed the existence of the vallorn in Axos, and learned a little of its history. There is more to discover here I think. Istacia says there was a road that connected Cavan to Béantal Dol, and in some way to Therunin. I might be able to find out more if I travel to the north-west, to Kabanja, and visit with the inhabitants of Ipotavo. Such an investigation may also be helpful in working out how we might connect Cavan to the trods and begin to leech the vallorn power from Visokuma.

It is also possible that if we stay in Axos and continue to investigate the impact of Terunael on the Victorious Axis that we may be able to learn more about these descendants of Terunael who lived in the fallen citadel of Soloha.

Alternatively, I can begin the long journey back to the Empire, and a more reasonable climate. I leave the matter in your hands, Advisor.

PART TWO

A Report from the Hills of Asukara For Siân Eternal the Advisor on the Vallorn

I am a Navarr, so long travel is in my blood. In some ways long and sometimes horrible as the last five months have been, they have been marked also by wonders. The arching Towers of Kantor, the sprawling Halls of Maykop, the vast wall of Ipotavo, even the blasted wasteland of Kaban and the seething madness of the Vallorn of Cavan... some of them have been terrible but I am richer for having experienced them.

As I write these words my companions are sleeping, all save Ekimunna our guide from Ipotavo. Tomorrow we will go separate ways – most to return to the Empire, myself and Ekimunna will travel north, over the hills, seeking a pass through the mountains into unknown territory.

From Visokuma

From the tormented depths of Visokuma our party returned to Kantor to recuperate. While at the embassy there, we received your commission to continue. We spent some time speaking with the Axou merchants, discussing the problem of traveling easily from one side – in this cast the east coast – to the other side of the nation. The forest of Visokuma prevents easy travel overland. If we wished to learn more about the Terunael refugees who sought sanctuary at the vanished Citadel of Solokha, we would need to pursue a circuitous route that would take us through all three of the remaining citadels.

I negotiated with Istacia of Maykop to make the first leg of the journey with her aboard her black-sailed vessel. I think in part she still felt some guilt for the actions of her ancestors. We spoke of a number of topics, mostly around our shared experience as scholars and researchers.

She was no expert, but she agreed to talk to me about the lost citadel of the *Spires of Solokha* which stood once in the far west of Axos. Axou history teaches that Solokha was destroyed by the Empire in the reign of Emperor Nicovar.

The story of the destruction of Solokha was based as much hearsay and hyperbole as it was in fact, and Istacia admitted that to me freely from the start. The citadel had always kept itself somewhat apart from the others – Solokha herself was said to be both the youngest and the most gentle of the six Sorcerer-

Kings who founded the great citadel. A true master of the magic of Autumn, Solokha was said to have a transcendent understanding of the ways bonds form between people, and how societies are influenced by the simplest touch. She was said to be wise and even-handed, and served as a moderating influence in the disagreements of her peers. Each Grand Ilarch of Solokha that followed after was built in this mould – an arbiter, a peacekeeper, and a judge. Istacia sadly lamented that with the destruction of Solokha, a balance went out of the politics of Axos. Before, the Grand Ilarchs were more likely to reach an understanding; since the destruction of Solokha, the squabbles and internicine rivalries between the citadels has become more pronounced. The Tunnels of Kaban would never have fallen to the orcs, said Istacia, if Solokha had still stood among the circle of the citadels. She would have stood beside Ipotavo, and helped to defend her neighbour citadel. As it was, in the absence of Solokha, it was easy for Issyk, Maykop, and Kantor to look to their own protection, to see the destruction of Kaban as a boon rather than the terrible loss it in truth represented.

The fall of Solokha, she said, lay in the very even-handedness that marked its Grand Ilarchs. Alone of the citadels, Solokha sought communion with the Empire – with the people of Urizen in particular – and it was this openness that created an opportunity for Imperial agents to strike against them.

On the subject of quite how they destroyed Solokha, Istacia was a little vague. Contemporary reports, she said, spoke of a “night of madness and terror” that overwhelmed the people and caused them to slaughter each other in a wave of unspeakable acts. This dark shadow was evoked by the Empire, most likely magicians of Urizen, who were jealous of the wisdom of Axos, and of Solokha in particular. According to some historians. The mad emperor Nicovar in some fashion feared that Solokha was a threat to his throne, or perhaps he coveted some treasure that the Solokhan people possessed – for they had indeed a great storehouse of unique objects gathered from the four corners of the world and studied for the wisdom they might present about their crafters.

The Halls of Maykop

Where Kantor strives towards the sky, the Halls of Maykop sprawl across the coast of Axos. Built atop great black cliffs, the port here is tiny in comparison to that at Kantor, or the grand quays of Sarvos or Siroc. The city itself is reached by winding stairways cut into the cliffside rocks, steep and vertiginous. Cranes atop the cliffs reminded me a little of the cliffs of Cargo, but they were

much smaller and fewer in number. Most of the ships visiting Maykop brought scholars, or petitioners, rather than trade goods.

The cliffsides are spotted with caves that open into the tunnels that lie beneath Maykop, the same kinds of catacomb we had encountered in Kantor. They are said to resolve into a great labyrinth beneath the citadel, with their upper levels actually being inhabited by the poorest citizens of the Halls who live side-by-side with the dead. There are vaults deep within these passages guarded by great iron doors, we were told, behind which sleep the greatest of the Axou necromantia.

As I said, the citadel sprawls where Kantor strives. Few buildings had more than a couple of storeys, but at the heart of the city lies the great palace of learning, the College of Necromantia, from which the citadel's power flows. The greatest magicians in a nation ruled by magic study here, mastering the arts of death alongside more mundane curricula dealing with leadership, history, natural philosophy, and the arts.

Kantor bustles and surges with life, but Maykop is a stark opposite. Silence is king here, broken only by the occasional tolling of leaden bells. To be in Maykop is to always feel as if you are in a great library, or the most strict of the Highborn chapterhouses. Loud noise and revelry are forbidden by order of the Grand Ilarch – the people here feel most keenly the fall from grace that has overtaken the people of Axos. There are cults among the students, it is said, that worship death itself not as the great leveller, the great weapon of the Creator against humanity, but as the most potent weapon to be wielded to separate the worthy from the unworthy. These cults are hunted wherever they are found, and engage in acts of terror and sabotage against the rulers of Maykop.

We made some enquiries here about the descendants of Terunael, but few here seemed interested in cooperating with us. On the matter of trade, they lent their ears to Ilarch Maxatious. On the matters of scholarship, however, they inclined their heads to none save the masters of their college, and their Grand Ilarch. Only the aid of Istacia, who spoke on our behalf, allowed us to glean what little information we were able to find here.

From the histories of Maykop

Most of the sources we were permitted to study agreed with what Istacia had already told us. Some “scholarly” treatises attempted to recast the past in terms more palatable to modern audiences, speaking of “misunderstandings” and “unfortunate incidents” but these smacked of the worst kind of revisionism. In the older books and scrolls, a stark, cruel history of oppression unfolded. Our ancestors’ hands were not clean of blood – they had taken it upon themselves to conquer a sovereign nation by force of arms, to seize its territory, and in the end had paid the ultimate price.

That the Axos Nicitis was driven by vengeance long-denied is hard to refute. Yet, perhaps there are those in the Empire who would have done the same if the opportunity presented itself. People are cruel, and not so different the world over.

There was some little ray of hope however. That Terunael blood survives in the veins of the Axou is without doubt. Here and there would be references to “heirs of Cavan” – sometimes quite prominent figures whose ancestry traced to the last generation of the doomed Terunael city. Some more recent texts seemed to believe “Cavan” was simply the name of an obscure ancestor, presented as a somewhat cruel courtier at one city or another or (more rarely) a powerful Spring magician whose magic overwhelmed him. It was fascinating to see the name recorded alongside other prominent Axou ancestors – although nowhere near as prestigious as the Six Sorcerer-Kings of course.

We found also confirmation that the Citadel of Solokha did indeed offer sanctuary to some of the refugees of Cavan. The refuge they offered was not unconditional however. According to several old documents the Grand Ilarch of ancient Solokha, at the time of the destruction of Terunael, refused to allow the “great sorcerers” of Cavan to take refuge, forcing them back into the jaws of the spreading vallorn. Those who were taken in by the Spires were soldiers, crafters, and farmers rather than nobles. It is easy to see why the people of Solokha might have been reticent to offer a home to the magicians whose ritual had just destroyed their city. Furthermore those “grand sorcerers” were most likely the nobles and rulers of Cavan – people who had treated the people of Axos as servants for so many years.

I was also able to read several accounts of Solokha, but here my access was greatly restricted. The librarians were happy to bring me books that decried the

Empire as cowardly traitors and assassins, which tended to focus on the tragic loss of Sokolah rather than on anything to do with Terunael survivors.

One thing I did glean from these tracts, however, was that there were still some people living near Solokha as recently as twenty years ago – hermits in the hills near where the citadel had once stood. They were descendants of the citadel dwellers, and if I could locate them they may well be able to tell me more of the Terunael who had taken refuge there.

Overland to Ipotavo

Our stay here was not extended; after much discussion with Istacia, we resolved to bypass the Chambers of Issyk and travel overland to Ipotavo. Imperial citizens are not welcome in Issyk, which makes little secret of the fact that it prefers the patronage of the Grendel orcs of the Broken Shore to the favour of the Empire. It was doubtful the Grand Ilarch himself would move against us, but it would be all too easy for someone who sought to curry favour with the Grendel to harm us, or to imprison us, or sell us to their orc allies.

With that in mind, and with our funds low, we hired a single ox wagon. Istacia sent her own grand-niece Ekimunna to accompany us and serve as a guide. A pleasant conversationalist, Ekimunna had little of her great-aunt's scholarship. She was a freelance scout, who accompanied expeditions such as ours on a regular basis, and possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of the lands through which we would pass.

We gave Issyk a wide berth while keeping to the roads. This proved to be more difficult than we might have imagined. Axos does not have very many roads in truth and they tend to serve solely to connect the citadels to each other. We travelled for three weeks along winding tracks connecting sprawling farms, far from urban civilisation. It put me in mind from time to time of traveling the trods, but without the great energy and vitality that comes from their magic. Sometimes days would pass without us seeing another traveler – most pilgrims are traveling between the citadels, or toward the citadels, not moving between them.

After nearly a month, we reached Ipotavo.

The gates of Ipotavo

The Gates of Ipotavo is the last true citadel along the north-western borders of Axos. Incredibly heavily fortified, it is built into the gentle side of a low mountain and surrounded by multiple rings of walls. Each wall bears three gates; there are seven walls in all. The highest point of the citadel reaches above the peak of the mountain, and is topped with a beacon that is barely visible in the day and sends out three equidistant beams of dim radiance at night.

To the north and south of the city spreads a solid, remarkably thick stone wall supported by white granite. It is patrolled day and night by silent, unmoving sentinels. The wall blocks a narrow valley that provides what appears to be the only easy route into eastern Axos. Ipotavo guards the richer citadels of Issyk, Maykop, and Kantor from the threat of the Druj, and there is some resentment here.

They have been in the wars, too many years of standing sole sentinel against the malice of the orcs of the Mallum show in their city and their faces. Yet none of their resentment is directed to us – quite the contrary. When they discover we are from the Empire, as often as not they are pleased to meet us and greet us as friends asking after the health of the “Siegebreakers” of Ipotavo - Tanwyn Ankarien and Otto Freidrich Von Holberg and the others.

We spoke here with scholars, and gleaned a little of value. One old historian, Archimech of Ipotavo, entertained us for an evening with white wine and a finely-spiced meal of mutton and root vegetables. He regaled us with stories of history, and knew a little more of the Terunael exiles in Solokah.

Unlike the other survivors, the refugees from Cavan were welcomed to Solokah and given leave to stay. Five families in all, so Archimech claimed, formed from the survivors, divided almost along caste-lines; farmers, miners, builders, artisans, and soldiers. The soldiers and the artisans were convinced it would be possible to reclaim Cavan, and absolve themselves of their ancestor's failure. The others – the farmers, miners, and builders – they were less convinced. Over time, so Archimech claimed, they blended their blood with the Axou, and became indistinguishable from their hosts.

When Solokah opened its doors to the Empire – to the Urizen – they came east from Mahal. According to Archimech, this is the territory to the west of Axos that once upon a time was home to the introspective Skourans, before the

Broken Shore orcs expanded north and drove them from their homes. The descendants of the soldiers and the artisans called themselves the Blood of Cavan, and they made some tentative contact with the Navarr who were themselves the descendants of the Terunael from other fallen cities. Why they did not make closer cause, given both groups were dedicated to the destruction of the Vallorn, he could not say.

Then, of course, the disastrous treachery of the Empire destroyed Solokah.

Ipotavo to Kaban

Caravans head west from Ipotavo regularly, taking supplies to the ruins of Kaban. It was a simple matter for us to accompany one of those caravans through the desolate lands that lie beyond the Great Walls.

We passed through the great Gates from which the Citadel takes its name, and journeyed west. There are few settlements east of Ipotavo – the Druj saw to that. Those we passed were quite fortified, and their farms relatively small. It will be years before prosperity returns in full to this region of Axos.

The camps around Kaban, even so long since its destruction, were wretched places. The tunnels had been ruined in the controlled devastation invoked by the sorcerers of Ipotavo. New structures were being built around the crater-rim where once the Tunnels had been. The sullen faces of the survivors, and the emissaries of the other citadels who offered them succour, predicted little welcome for us. We spent enough time to realise there was nothing for us here, and then moved on.

Ekimunna had spent some time talking to some Maykop emissaries, and had from them learnt the location of one of the hidden villages of the so-called Remaining Ones – the few who still claimed blood ties to Solokah and the Throne of Autumn. High in the hills to the west, they had weathered the invasion of the Druj through a combination of seclusion and magic of the Night realm.

Our guide was certain she could bring us to the Remaining Ones, but warned us that they may well hold a grudge against Imperials. Our party had an intense discussion about whether to proceed – there were good arguments for both continuing and for turning back – but in the end we agreed to stay in Axos just a little longer.

The Curse of Solokah

With Ekimunna leading the way we travelled into the hills to the west. The further from Kaban we traveled, however, the more unsettled our party became. It began simply enough after a week or so of travel. It was noticeable that we began to squabble and grumble more, and outbursts of temper became more common. We snapped at one another. It became clear that we were sleeping poorly – my own dreams were riven as often as not with unsettling dreams of failure and despair that became stronger the further west we travelled. In idle moments, I began to suspect that innocent Ekimunna – our resolute guide – was leading us toward destruction.

When finally I challenged her, she was initially surprised and then relieved. She had, she said, forgotten that we were unaware of the dangers of the western hills. Before leaving Maykop, knowing we might end up here, she had sought out a blessing from one of her ancestors, to guard her spirit and keep her true to her course. After some further explanation, we understood her to mean she had received an anointing from a priest.

The hills where once Solokah stood, she said, are believed to be haunted by the angry ghosts of all those who were slain when the citadel was destroyed – and the hungry spirits of those ancestors who had gone nearly two centuries forgotten and without the honours that the living paid to them. The darkness had seeped into the very hills themselves, and corrupted unguarded minds. We had been lucky – there were stories of travellers in the hills here who had turned against each other in a frenzy of bloodletting.

We had, by fortune, a small supply of liao that we had brought with us to trade, should it be necessary. Brianne had studied the ceremonies, and with her aid we were able to receive the spiritual strength needed to shut out the insidious influence of the destroyed citadel – whether it was indeed the activity of ghosts or some malign influence related to the circumstances of the destruction was impossible to say. What mattered was that we slept more easily, and found it easier to turn aside the black thoughts that crowded around us. Finally, we came at last to the outermost remnant of the citadel of Solokah. Ruins, overgrown by centuries of neglect, were all that remained of the once vibrant city. Even with the anointing Brianne had provided, the desolation seeped into our spirits. We resolved to stay one night, and then travel north-west to where Ekimunna believed a Remaining One encampment might be found if we were lucky.

Reimos of Solokah

That night, while we rested around a subdued camp fire talking quietly, we were startled to be accosted by a man's voice. Old but unstooped, dressed in threadbare Axos robes, leaning on a staff, he approached our fire, his expression grim.

Reimos of Solokah, he told us was his name, and we were trespassing on a place sacred to the Throne of Autumn. Despite cautioning from both Brienne and Ekimunna, I invited him to join our hearth and not to fear our intentions – we sought the blood of Solokah, and were not his enemies.

Grudgingly, he accepted our invitation, although he would not touch our food or drink our watered beer, he appreciated the warmth of the fire. After he had settled a little, I engaged him in conversation about the fall of Solokah and the Blood of Cavan – something about which he was surprisingly knowledgeable.

He was not a man for long speeches – it was clear he lived as a hermit here for most of his life and was not experienced in conversing with strangers.

The Blood of Cavan had survived, he said, to the point where Solokah fell. They were little more than a society of scholars and historians who felt some connection to the fallen city. Their proud heritage as soldiers, committed to the destruction of the vallorn, had been diluted over time as their blood had become diluted with the blood of Axos. Half of those who attended the meetings and called themselves Blood of Cavan had only the most tenuous connection to their forbears – and they were seen as strange and a little touched in the head by their neighbours.

The Vallorn of Cavan slept, said the people of Solokah. Why risk rousing its ire? You have become our brothers and sisters, why cleave to old ways that are without meaning? These words, said Reimos, simply served to make the Blood of Cavan more resolute in their commitment to a forgotten cause.

By this time, some of the Navarr had come to Axos, by winding routes. The Blood of Cavan and those Navarr who came to Solokah... they did not find much common ground. Sadly, the centuries had taken them on different paths. The Blood of Cavan saw the Navarr as heirs to Terunael only in name, and assumed that they would bow their heads to them and take their lead. For their part, the Navarr saw the Blood of Cavan as pretenders who had achieved nothing in a millennium but expected to be treated as long-lost brothers and

sisters. Few enough Navarr came to Solokah, or to Axos, anyway. Perhaps that is why our people knew so little of the Blood, and of the Vallorn here.

They came through Mahal, along a narrow route through the high passes of Skoura. There was a spire in Mahal, said Reimos, inhabited by Urizeni diplomats and scholars, who sometimes spoke to Solokah on behalf of the Empire.

I remember that the longer he spoke, the quieter his voice became and the lower the fire burned. Not one of us stirred to build it higher. We were all spellbound by his words, by his gentle cadence. He brought peace with him, that soothed our tired limbs and quieted the uncertainty that had begun to grow within us.

It was emissaries from Urizen, said Reimos, that the doom of Solokah came. He spoke sadly, with little anger in his voice. Some said the final doom came at the command of Nicovar, but others said that the people of the citadel brought their doom upon themselves, and that Nicovar knew little of them or their final fate.

The citadel of Solokah had a great collection of unique objects gathered from all corners of the known world. Among them was a certain sarcophagus of black stone. For decades the people of Solokah had striven to understand it, to encompass the knowledge it represented. In the end, they had drawn close. A ritual was planned – my breath stilled at this, at the impending doom so clear in his words – to plumb the secrets of the sarcophagus. From courtesy, and in the hope they might offer insight of their own, emissaries from Urizen were invited to Solokah to observe and to participate if they so wished.

Disaster struck. The Urizen in some fashion disrupted the rite, unleashing the force trapped within the black stone. Madness overwhelmed all the people of Solokah. Murderous madness. Brother fought against brother, parent against child, lifelong friends tore each other apart as the madness spread and multiplied. Only a handful resisted the chaos – a handful of blessed folk who embraced the way of Understanding were able to stand against the delirium that consumed their people. The citadel burned, and the people of Solokah burned with it, and the darkness seeped into the stone and the hills and remains there to this day.

Not everyone fell, said Reimos. Some few escaped the fall of Solokah. For reasons Reimos would not touch on, they did not seek sanctuary in Kaban or

Ipotavo, but instead went somewhere else. North through the high pass, through the mountains to... somewhere safe.

As Reimos finished his tale, my eyelids were so heavy I could not remain awake any further and I slipped into a deep and dreamless sleep. When we awoke the next morning, we were refreshed as if we had slept a night beside a trod. Of Reimos there was no sign... no sign he had ever sat by our fire and no tracks leading to or departing from our camp. Perhaps he was just an old hermit who crept away while we slept. Perhaps he was something else.

Conclusion

This then is the parting of our ways. Ekimunna and I will seek the high pass, to follow in the footsteps of the survivors of Solokah. If they survived the madness that consumed their citadel, there might still be some descendants living in the north – wherever the pass may take us.

I could return and consider my commission complete but I have chosen to take a leave of absence, a sabbatical, to pursue this matter further. Taval, Brianne, and the others will return to Kantor and from there to the Empire bringing this letter with them as well as my request to Leontes for time to pursue personal research. As soon as I can, I will contact you to let you know what I have learned – if anything.

PART THREE

An Addendum by Siân Eternal

The previous documentation is the last expedition update I received from Ellian Sweetwater. I did however receive a Winged Messenger letter from them early in the Summer Solstice of 382YE. They found themselves on the Black Plateau beset by Druj and asked for help.

A group of Navarri Thorns travelled through the Sentinel Gate to rescue them. They had little to no memory of the months prior to their rescue with their most recent recollection being of travelling with a group of orcs and humans clad in colourful woollen attire.

From their descriptions of events and subsequent research (especially that of the spy network into the Mountains of the Moon) we have been able to deduce that they made their way into the mountains to learn more only to discover the People of Tsark. Perhaps these are the descendants of the survivors of Solokah whom they were travelling in the footsteps of.

It seems however that the People of Tsark are very secretive. They travelled with Ellian and kept them blindfolded and their memories fogged (perhaps through application of Night magic). Pages of their notebook were ripped out when we found them and they had a curse placed upon them that drove them to want nothing more than to 'Go home and stay there'

It would appear that the people who travelled with Ellian wanted them to remember nothing of their home but still escorted them safely out of their lands and towards their home. However, they were not prepared for the reality of the Back Plateau and the barbarians they would face when they came out of the valley.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON GHITA'S VEILS

During the Spring Equinox of 383YE, the proxy for Siân Eternal, Advisor on the Vallorn, instructed the historical research department to look into the matter of the Veils. Ellian Sweetwater was assigned to carry out the research.

The Veils

In the northern Sobral Grasses lie an enigmatic sequence of complex interlocking trenches a little under a foot deep called Ghita's Veils. They sweep across a rough circle of grassland four miles in diameter. Granite basins of water are placed at several locations. While some are fed by freshwater streams, others must be filled manually, and many have been inlaid with Mithril, weltsilver and orichalcum. These basins collect crystal mana, and are carefully tended by a small group of hermits who find the isolation and silence of Ghita's Veils particularly appealing.

The veils are exceedingly old and some historians believe they are of Teruanael origin. According to scholars who have made a study of the area, there are some similarities between their design and the patterns favoured by the Navarr. The hermits mostly shrug, and say that they are what they are. Whoever Ghita was, and why this place is named for her veils, is not certain.

Prior to the Spring Equinox 382YE, there were a number of six-foot pillars of basalt, smoothed and shaped by the elements, scattered seemingly at random across the design. This changed when an earthquake shook the entire Sobral Grasses, centred on Ghita's Veils. Each of the basalt pillars cracked and broke. Some still stand, but most fell into rubble. At the same time, many of the ditches collapsed, while others filled with water from some heretofore unknown aquifer. The design, whatever its purpose, was fundamentally disrupted.

The Quiet Order

The Veils are mentioned a few times in historical records as an important site in the production of mana crystals but nothing more. The only note of interest uncovered by the researchers studying the location was the establishment of the Quiet Order - the order of sombre hermits that began to service the site sometime around 300YE.

When the order was established, the site had apparently been experiencing difficulties finding Freeborn magicians prepared to work the Veils for some time. People complained that the work left them feeling drained and weary, and were loathe to spend more than a few weeks at a time gathering the mana. The issue was resolved when a young Marcher called Jill of Shep's Hill settled in the area. The woman had been a soldier fighting with the Bounders near Holberg when she had been captured by the Druj. By the time the Empire were able to rescue her and her fellow soldiers, she was no longer able to fight. She was apparently troubled by night terrors, a lingering curse from the Druj that could not be broken. She was discharged from the army and eventually settled in the Sobral Grasses following the advice of a Navarr guide to "find somewhere that her spirit could rest easy."

Eventually she ended up working at the Veils, which she claimed helped to settle her mind. Over a period of five years, she established the Quiet Order, as a retreat for those who had suffered in the war against the Druj and struggled to find peace. It appears that some element of the magic that surrounded the Veils served to suppress their nightmares and allowed these people a form of respite. Over time people simply accepted the Order as part of the strangeness of the Veils and thought no more of it.

Having spoken with the members of the Quiet Order who still work the site it appears that whatever beneficial calm it once provided has now gone. It seems that if there was ever something more to this location than a simple mana site, it is now gone.

The Sobral Tremor

Civil service records show that the the mana site was recovered from the Lasambrians following the liberation of Segura by Imperial troops in Spring 378YE. At the time, the site was considered to be a well established mana site and nothing more. The architecture was notable for the curious design and for its antiquity but other than that there was no reason to assume it was anything more. The site clearly predates any Freeborn construction and is widely believed to be Terunael in origin, although it bears pointing out that Imperial historians have a bad habit of simply assuming that everything that was built before the Empire was Ternuael in origin. In this case however, there seems to be no reason to think otherwise and the similarities of the designs with Navarr designs lend some credence to the theory.

Unfortunately there are no records of the Military Council's decision regarding the disposition of the site, but it eventually came into the possession of Carlos i Shattered Tower i Guerra, who was at that time a citizen of the Brass Coast, and has since joined the Highborn nation. The site went unnoted during this time, until it suffer a dramatic collapse during the Spring Equinox. On the last day of the summit, a violent tremor hit the region causing the ground to shake violently. The quake was short-lived, but strong enough to knock people off their feet, and cause minor property damage in most places. It appeared to be centred on Ghita's Veils; many of the ditches collapsed while others flooded. It was clear that the design of the mana site was fundamentally destroyed. In particular, each of the basalt pillars suffered catastrophic damage, leaving them cracked and broken. Most still stand, but several fell into rubble. Fortunately nobody was killed by the quake.

Ellian points out that the date is notable. While it is theoretically *possible* that the tremor was entirely spontaneous, the timing strongly suggests it was triggered by a ritual performed at Anvil on that day.

The general assumption was that the mana site would be destroyed by the tremor. Instead, after the quake had run its course, the mana site appeared to be much more powerful than before. The flows of mana in the area were *strengthened*, not weakened; the site produced *more* mana not less. Local magicians conducted a careful analysis of the Veils and their conclusion was that the arrangement of ditches and stones was actually serving to *contain* the flows of mana - not enhance them. They could provide no explanation for why someone would do that but they were as certain as they could be that the whole thing had been built to keep everything "bottled up". With the wards gone, the steady stream of mana became a torrent and though it needed work to reposition the granite basins, the crystals formed quickly and in greater numbers than before.

At the same time, however, magicians across the Sobral Grasses experienced peculiar nightmares. The dreams were all remarkably similar, with only minor difference. The report at the time said that each began "...with the earth breaking open, and water rising. Then a great wind begins to blow - a typhoon or hurricane that flattens the grass and rips the clouds asunder. A terrible moaning is heard, along with the sound of fighting and shouting, and flickering shapes. Then silence... broken a moment later by a soft, absolutely bone chilling sigh from someone just behind the dreamer. Each nightmare ends with the dreamer starting awake filled with a profound terror that quickly fades."

These disturbing dreams were not repeated on later nights, and most magicians dismissed them as a consequence. Ominous, but ultimately without significance. Indeed, they may not have been connected to the tremors at all - they could easily have been caused by the actions of an eternal making a nuisance of itself in the region, or a conjunction of the stars, or something of that nature. The magical flows quickly returned to normal and by the Summer Solstice that same year there were no apparent lingering effects of the disruption to the Veils.

Bargita's Vale

Ellian Sweetwater and her fellow scholars were able to uncover one other potential lead regarding the history of the site. Civil service records show registration of one "Bargita's Vale" recorded to Gaius of the Frozen Oak, a Highborn chapter with a grim reputation.

According to the records, *Gaius of the Frozen Oak*, "acquired" "Bargita's Vale" after winning a game of cards at Anvil. Although the names are not a precise match, Ellian was fairly confident that this is simply an older name for the same site. Sadly there are no accompanying notes; the chapter of the Frozen Oak is believed to no longer exist having been consumed by the Winter realm in some poorly understood fashion.

Following up on the lead, Ellian uncovered a single document that might be of interest to those concerned with Ghita's Veils - a letter from a Highborn scholar to their cousin relating to investigations performed at the site by Highborn magisters. If it is to be believed, the purpose of Ghita's Veils is significantly more sinister than anyone previously suspected.

Cousin,

I write to confirm your suspicions are correct and this site which you have won is much more than it first appears. We have completed a full study of the site and the results are somewhat alarming. I urge you to take great caution with the site and with how you dispose of it. The site is dangerous, that much we can say with certainty, and it is typical of the frivolity and weakness of the Freeborn mind that they fell to playing cards over who should curate it. I trust you will not make the same mistake.

Firstly the basins are nothing of concern; their purpose is to collect the mana that is escaping the central area and nothing more. The key element of the Vale is the standing stones - that is what is focusing the winter magic. Initially we

assumed that the stones were serving to amplify the flows of mana in some way, looking for ways to amplify that as you had asked. The stones are curious, they appear to be Terunael in origin, and we know from the finds at Caska's Grove that those people were much given to magical stones. These designs are very different in layout and purpose, but they appear to match the style used in other finds, so I satisfied of their provenance.

But the stones do not serve to amplify the magic here - quite the contrary - they do the opposite. If you will permit me the analogy, it is like someone has built a dam across a river. The intention is not to enhance the flow but rather to hold it back. We spent time checked the rituals on two different stones to see if there was any discrepancy or error but the results were identical each time. The stones formed part of a powerful magic barrier, built to contain the magic of the Vale. On the face of it, it appears the Terunael identified this site as being particularly rich in the flow of mana and on discovering that they invested considerable effort to ensure that it would produce as little mana crystals as possible.

That is madness of course, nobody would do that, and so we dug a little deeper. We found nothing for a week, but eventually young Mikhael hit upon the idea that we should excavate the area to see if anything was under the ground. It was a wise and auspicious choice and I intend to recommend him to the exarch upon my return. The boy shows great talent and insight.

We had to dig down deep to find it, almost eight down in total, but we knew we were on to something as soon as we began work. Mixed in with the hard packed earth were chunks of white granite, carved into warding stones and engraved with markings clearly meant to resemble the Constellation of the Chain. Beneath those we discovered a stone sarcophagus similarly carved and warded, and inside were the decayed remains of an inhuman body, wrapped in mithril chains and secured to the base of the casket.

The body was quite dead of course, but there was no doubt of any kind that the creature's soul was still present. As soon as we removed the lid of the casket it writhed and screamed in fury, assaulting us with vile epithets and curses. Several of our group collapsed under the burden of the assault, only the most heroic of us were able to withstand the burden. Only when we were able to push the casket closed did the wailing end.

Working as quickly as possible we restored the earth, putting the warding stones back where we found them. Having reviewed the situation and

discussed the matter with the team, I am as certain as I can be that the function of the standing stones, and indeed every other part of the Vale that is human in design, is to contain the restless spirit trapped within the sarcophagus. I suspect that the occupant was buried alive, and the warding stones erected to ensure that their spirit could not escape the pit no matter what.

If the site is Terunael in nature, then the spirit has clearly been trapped for a very long time. According to Gannicus' Libram of Dark Spirits, such things grow more powerful over time. I regard that as distinctly unproven personally, Gannicus is much given to rhetorical flourishes and an obsession with old things that clouds his virtue. But if it is true, then it is a particularly powerful and malignant spirit that we are dealing with. It is clearly exactly where it should be and I can see no good reason whatsoever that it should not stay there til the creator unmakes the Labyrinthe.

Of course there is always the possibility that some torch bearing idiot comes out here, determined to dig this up and "find the truth of it". That would be nothing short of a disaster and must be prevented at all costs. The best Imperial outcome would be for whatever is bound in Bargita's Vale to remain burned and forgotten, that way no harm can come of it.

Ehud

Letter recovered by Ellian Sweetwater

More Questions than Answers

Needless to say, Elian Sweetwater's investigation of the site drew more questions than answers. If the tremors were caused by a ritual, what was the nature and purpose of that ritual? If Bargita's Vale is an earlier name for the location, who was Bargita? is it the creature the Highborn magisters described? The name does not look particularly Imperial, nor reminiscent of known Terunael names. Why were the Veils subduing the flows of magic for all these centuries? Why go to such efforts to bind a restless spirit - assuming the Highborn letter is to be believed? Why did all of the basalt pillars collapse at the same time? Basalt is hardly a fragile material and yet every single one of the pillars spread across the Veils was broken in a single night. For that matter, where did the basalt pillars originate? The nearest quarry it could have come from is likely in far away Kahraman. Why carry the volcanic stone into the middle of the sweeping Sobral Grasses? Did the location really help to subdue bad dreams, and if so what property of the Veils provided that subtle enchantment?

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Historical research is going to uncover the answers to these, or any similar questions. The scholars of the department have scoured existing records, and spoken with members of the Quiet Order. If there is further information to be found it will need to come from somewhere else. The chapter of the Frozen Oak is, by all accounts, unreachable. The hermits of the Quiet Order seem to know little of the actual history of the place - indeed it is questionable whether the Order will continue to exist now that the former therapeutic properties of the Veils appear to have been compromised. There is almost nothing of interest regarding the Veils in the records of the civil service, or the libraries of the Freeborn citizens of Segura.

For now, it seems, the trail appears to have gone cold.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH INTO THE SUNGOLD PASS

Commissioned by Caleb of the Cenotaph, Minister of Historical Research.

Sungold Pass lies high in the Opascari mountains. In the wake of a terrible storm that wracked northern Varushka shortly after the Autumn Equinox 381YE, it was one of several sites of interest discovered by the Empire along with the monument at Wendell's Hope, the Bredavoi Cave, and the foundations of Irontooth Keep.

Almost immediately, the pass became a source of contention between the Empire and the orcs of Otkodov; its position high in the mountains allowed both nations to claim it as part of their own territory.

The Imperial Senate laid claim to Sungold Pass and the ruins there, but the Thule immediately responded with claims of their own. The situation was eventually resolved diplomatically a year later when the Imperial Senate agreed that the pass belonged to the Thule as part of the negotiations around the Sungold Treaty securing the release of Imperial slaves by the northern orcs.

Uncovering the Pass

In the wake of the great storm in later 382YE, an avalanche rumbled down the eastern foothills of Opascari. Prospectors and wagon raiders keen to explore discovered that the rock fall had uncovered something entirely unexpected. Above the treeline on the side of the easternmost peak, known for centuries by the peculiar name of *the Traveller*, they found the remains of an outpost carved into the stone walls of a high and hitherto overlooked mountain pass. Excited archaeologists and scholars were quick to declare that the structure was almost certainly Terunael in origin! Some Thule remains found in the ruins suggested that the archaeologists were not the first people of the modern age to come here - but were still the first people to come here in the last century.

The exploration uncovered the remains of both orcs and humans, as well as a few minor trinkets that seem to date dating back to the time of Chaos after the fall of Terunael. Perhaps even more interesting was the discovery that these ruins were part of an extensive orichalcum mining and smelting operation. The peak is tricky to reach, and very cold indeed, but it was clear that with a little effort the mines could be reopened, and the primitive smelting facilities updated and expanded.

Some of the explorers also discovered what appeared to be peculiar decorations - inlaid mithril designs that wound and swirled across the parts of the ruins. Quite by chance it was discovered that when these designs were warmed - by a torch or brazier or even by extended contact with human skin - they held that heat. Furthermore, if the heat source were strong enough, the warmth would spread slowly through entire sections of the ruins. It seemed obvious that these designs were intended to combat the bitter cold of the high mountains.

Obviously, there was some interest in these ruins among the Navarr. Speculation suggested that this ancient Terunael outpost was most likely connected with the city of Emrys in Sküld, the existence of which had only recently been rediscovered by Navarr scholars.

The Snowstorm Henk Incident

In Spring 383YE. The Minister of Historical Research, Caleb of the Cenotaph, instructed the Department of Historical Research to prepare a report on the history of the area. As part of the commission, the adventurous Imperial Orc scholar Snowstorm Henk led a small team of orc researchers up to the pass. While exploring the area, the civil servants were taken prisoner by the Thule who accused them of trespass, theft, and espionage.

The researcher and four of his companions were imprisoned in the Thule camp on the northern slopes of the Traveller. A Navarr magistrate was grudgingly allowed into the camp to see them - and was consequently able to smuggle a short report prepared by Henk back to the Minister of Historical Research. After further negotiation, Yevgeni Katzev (the Ambassador to Otkodov) issued a formal apology to the Thule on behalf of the Empire, and Henk and his companions were released shortly after although the artefacts they had recovered from the mine workings in the Pass were confiscated by the Thule.

The Sungold Treaty

Finally, in Summer 383YE, Yegeni Katzev prepared a treaty for ratification by the Senate, part of which concerned the disposition of Sungold Pass. Along with provisions for the return of Imperial slaves held in Otkodov, the Sungold Treaty formally conceded the Pass to the orcs. It was again proposed by the Senator for Karsk - Vuk The Wolfeater - and approved by the Senate. The Thule queried the exact language used, claiming that their understanding was

that the treaty would recognise that Sungold Pass was in Otkodov rather than in the Empire, but they did not challenge the treaty.

Almost immediately, according to Varushkan observers, the Thule moved labourers and soldiers into the pass and set about constructing a fortified wall that coincidentally served to conceal the mine workings from prying eyes. It is believed that the mine has now been reopened, and that metal is once again flowing down the northern slopes of the Traveller into Otkodov.

The Historical Research Report

Snowstorm Henk and his four companions - Skywise Slu, Blackbeak Ussa, and Snowstorm Makka - are the only Imperial citizens to have made even a cursory examination of the mine workings in Sungold Pass. Following their return to the Empire, the Imperial Orcs set about expanding the preliminary report they were able to have smuggled to the Minister of Historical Research. The report has since been made public knowledge by the Imperial Archivist and while it makes for interesting reading it may well raise more questions than it answers.

Preliminary Investigations

Sungold Pass proved to be an enigma. None of the historians spoken to had any information about the place. A very old pre-Imperial document about the establishment of a vale in Opascari long-since overwhelmed by wolves made a tantalising reference to "the high passes of the Traveller" but nothing else was uncovered.

Before heading to the Pass, Snowstorm Henk and Blackbeak Ussa made the trek to the vale of Void in Brez. A small party of cabalists had launched an expedition to explore the ruins shortly after they were discovered alongside a party of wagon raiders from drawn by the promise of orichalcum. They confirmed the supposition that the ruins were Terunael in nature, making use of divination rituals to explore the history of the place and the provenance of items found at the site. They were also able to examine some of the human and orc skeletal remains found in the upper mineworkings using Winter magic - among other things they were able to ascertain the names of the skeletons.

The bones were found to have originated in two specific time periods. The orc remains, and a handful of human skeletons, dated from 276YE. The orc skeletons had Thule names, while the human bones appeared to have primarily

Varushkan names. The remainder of the skeletons dated from the Chaos following the fall of Terunael. Specifically, they unearthed three sets of human remains from the Terunael period, interred beneath cairns, overlooking the mine workings. The bodies had been interred with grave goods which further confirmed that they were most likely Terunael who died around the time that Terunael fell. Of particular interest was the fact that each of the three wore an orichalcum medallion in the shape of a stylised sun which each bore a (long since faded) enchantment similar to that found on an Imperial Circlet of Falling Snow most likely marking them as having been magicians. The Varushkans confirmed that they had several items of interest recovered from the ruins in the pass and the upper mines, but declined to share them with the civil service scholars.

Following the meeting with the cabalists of Void, Henk met up with Skywise Slu and Snowstorm Makka on the lower slopes of the Traveller. The other two orcs had spoken with some of the wagon raiders who had initially discovered the mine in the Pass but confirmed that the raiders had mostly been interested in gathering as much orichalcum as possible before retreating back down the mountain. They claimed the ore - and the bars of processed metal they found scattered about the ruins - was good quality but not notable otherwise. It was not possible for the orcs to review any of the material as it had long since been sold on.

The Mine workings

Snowstorm Henk resolved to attempt to explore the ruins directly, reasoning that a small group would be able to get in and out without being noticed. His overconfidence very nearly proved to be his undoing, and he has been formally cautioned by the Imperial Archivist about refraining from any such foolish "adventures" in future.

The ruins above-ground ruins were not the focus of the expedition, but Henk confirmed what several Varushkan observers had reported - that there were signs of fortifications and barricades on both sides of the pass. Skywise Slu speculates in the report that the original Terunael builders who constructed the mine were as worried about attack from the south as from the north - perhaps understandable given the various horrors that populate the wilds of northern Varushka. In addition to smelting, sorting, and casting facilities clearly dedicated to the production of orichalcum, iron, and gold, there were remains of several stone buildings that appear to have been warehouses, barracks, and living quarters - many still partially buried. It seemed the Terunael were

refining the metal pulled from the bones of the mountain *in situ* before sending it on... wherever they were sending it.

The Golden Tracery

Henk reported that the tunnels leading deeper into the mountains were dangerous and prone to collapse. Several times promising avenues ended at solid walls of fallen rock. Blackbeak Ussa had been specifically recruited for their familiarity with mines - a skill the Liberated orc had gained through long years labouring in the mines of eastern Jarm. They confirmed that the mine workings were themselves a fine example of stone craft. The tunnels and galleries were narrow but well constructed as often. Where wood had been used to support the ceilings, it was generally weirwood - meaning they had survived the centuries relatively intact. Still, many parts of the ruined mine was unstable especially the larger galleries where Blackbeak Ussa cautioned that even a loud noise might trigger a catastrophic collapse.

Part of the danger was presented by what appeared to be quite extensive flooding. The water was freezing - and indeed in many of the lower tunnels the scholars explored had frozen solid creating beautiful but deadly icicles and columns of frozen water. Indeed, the tunnels rapidly became cold enough that even orcs toughened by the cold winters of Skarsind and wrapped in thick furs were unable to continue safely. Blackbeak Ussa speculated that any number of the lower galleries might be entirely choked with ice - although obviously how extensive the lower galleries and tunnels might prove to be was impossible to say.

The initial focus of the investigation were the mithril-tracers inlaid in the upper mine workings whose propensity for gathering and spreading heat had been remarked by the initial Varushkan exploration of the area. More thorough examination by the artisan Snowstorm Makka revealed that the metal used in these "decorations" was actually an alloy of mithril and orichalcum, spun and stretched to make wire, and then inlaid into the stone walls in sweeping, angular designs. The orcs speculated that the designs emanated from a single central point somewhere deep within the mountain - and further speculated that it was likely that wherever they came from there was likely to be a source of heat. There was no doubt that the heat-providing properties of the designs was intentional and exploited by the Terunael to keep the frigid air of the high peaks at bay - in several places the designs were also worked into the floor especially in the orichalcum mining galleries.

Relics

The upper mine workings had been largely picked clean of relics - either by the first Varushkan visitors or by the orcs of Otkodov. There was still some sign of the previous inhabitants however. In a narrow spur off one of the main tunnels on one of the upper levels, the orc scholars found four old tablets of slate covered in crabbed writing. A full translation was impossible in the poor conditions in the tunnels, but Snowstorm Henk reports that from a preliminary examination they were the journal or last testimony of a person who had fled south from *Emrys* and become trapped up in the mountains by the weather. Their food supplies were running out, and the heat that made the tunnels habitable was slowly fading. There were no remains found with the slates however. Pushing further down, the orcs found several more of these slates, again covered in crabbed handwriting. They expected to be able to review them at their leisure once they had returned to civilisation. Henk speculates that they were left for the benefit of "rescuers" that the person writing them was sure would come in the Spring.

In addition to the slates, the orcs found signs of recent disturbance. They reported a broken pick handle carved with the runes Pallas and Verys wedged into a wall and some spent torches marked with the Rune of Revelation. These remnants were less than a year old, and conclusively pointed to the Thule having made their own exploration of the mines - indeed it looked very much as if they had made preliminary attempts to begin working the upper mines.

Mithril

Perhaps more importantly, the orcs also discovered that it was not just orichalcum, iron, and gold that the Terunael had been mining in Sungold Pass; there was mithril here as well. Blackbeak Ussa confirmed the precious nature of the ore, and that while it certainly appeared to be a thin vein, it looked very much as if it went further down into the mountain that the orcs were able to reach. The first signs of the mithril were in a lower area, sheathed with ice, and at the very limit of the orcs ability to tolerate the cold. The walls here were particularly thick with the mithril-orichalcum designs, but Snowstorm Makka reported that between them the spreading ice had damaged several of them to the point where they were uncertain if they would continue to operate even if heat were provided.

Given the location of the Thule relics, Henk is confident that the orcs of Otkodov are aware of the mithril - indeed it looks as if they had removed some samples of the ore given recent signs of excavation in the lower galleries.

The Northern Slopes

At the limit of their supplies, and with the cold only intensifying, Snowstorm Henk decided to end the expedition and return back down the southern slopes. Unfortunately, while leaving the mines the Imperial Orcs ran afoul of a Thule patrol and were taken into custody. Serendipitously, this allowed them to get a much better look at the northern slopes of the traveller as they were marched to the main Thule camp in the foothills of Kógur.

Carved onto the northern side of the mountain, invisible from Varushka, there is an immense sun design. The scholars were unable to get a close look at it but described it as "impressive" - hundreds of feet in diameter and intricately carved. Speaking to one of the slaves at the Thule encampment, Henk reports that there is some evidence that the design at one point was inlaid with metal - although this latter information apparently comes from the mutterings of the slave's ancestors so should be treated as unreliable.

In addition to the presence of the great sun design, the orc scholars also report that while the pass is difficult to reach from the Volodmartz side, there is an obvious road that winds down the slopes of the Traveller on the Otkodov side. At some points, there were even still-intact stone railings. There were also several ruined stone structures at the base of the road that appeared to have been watchtowers, perhaps part of a larger fortification partially buried in old stone. The Thule had converted parts of these ruins to make their encampment.

Much of the road showed signs of having been recently excavated however - it looked as if there had been a significant collapse of avalanche that had shattered much of the approach and buried the road in hundreds of tons of stone at some point in the distant past - before the recent storms had caused further collapse serendipitously revealing parts of the road again and allowing the orcs to begin clearing the rest.

Final Notes

Henk finished his report with some further speculation. It is his opinion that someone – probably the Terunael but possibly the Thule - was mining the orichalcum and the mithril up in Sungold pass, then taking it down the mountain on the northern side. Given the presence of the unique designs clearly used to heat the tunnels, Henk speculates that the mine workings must have been especially rich - if only to justify the obvious expenditure of both orichalcum and mithril used to keep them habitable. There's no sign, incidentally, that the Terunael were moving anything either into the mountains or down to modern-day Volodmartz - the approach on the Varushkan side looks to have always been perilous and difficult.

The Thule themselves were aware of the ruins, but unable to reach them (or unwilling to spend the resources needed to reach them) until the great storm caused some of the previous stone blocking access to the ruins to be cleared. Indeed, Henk reported, the Thule were *very* interested in the ruins - to the degree that while the warlocks were interrogating the captured orcs there was often one of the Thule hollow present - the eyes and ears of one of the Dragons themselves.



Advisor's Notes: On Terunael

From cross referencing the previous documents a few things stand out that can hopefully be further investigated and verified with time:

The cities of Terunael worked together but had differing outlooks, each settlement was shaped by its environment and dealings with other nearby civilisations. They did however agree on the best way to run their cities.

Governed by mage councils (practitioners of magic, artisans and the leaders of their armies) the cities thrived and made many great developments both magical and mundane. The gold sun of Emrys, the heating within their mines and the curious tapping of magical energies in Ghita's Veils all speak to their magical acumen and the fact they taught the Axou building techniques such as aqueducts tells us that they were skilled architects.

Thanks to past life visions and supporting rituals not only do we know the cities were run by councils we also know additional details on some of the noteworthy individuals at the time of the fall.

Merenael of Emrys, who was married to Fallahd and fled to the Dreamscape with her child Jarith of Emrys after premonitions of the doom The Great Work would bring.

Amrillin is the potential name of a councillor of Tharunind. Marenael tried to warn him not to cast the ritual. They speak of his son, Coram Terayne, who he had sent to trade with the Gwerin Morfa near Beantol Dol. Coram wished to return home but had become trapped (either by barbarian assault or the birth of the Vallorn)

The council of one city – most likely Tharunind given the details of Father Drakov's past life visions (proximity to Beantol Dol and Urizen) was formed of a human Female General, a draughir male artisan, a changeling male general, a human male referred to as magus, Father Drakov himself and his 'aide' who may have been simply an aide or another member of the council bringing it to six. The human male, Father Drakov or the aide are likely the individual Merenael wrote to to warn about The Great Ritual.

In The Treaties on the Life of Navarr (see page 127) the excerpt from Pyre Blackroot's diary notes a Magister Naliath of Therunind. This is also potentially a name of one of the three individuals named above.

Pyre Blackroot also speaks of his grandmother, Nightshade, who was once Artificer Niryl of Hacynian.

One Magister is believed to be the father of Star, the Vate of Spring and Summer who travelled with Navarr and Thorn. He may have been a Magister in Seren though his roots are believed to be in Cavan.

The people of Terunael were Prideful, though it became an Arrogance that was arguably a large factor in their downfall. They were convinced of their superior magics that would see them through any hardships. They not only stubbornly forged new cities in hostile environments they used threats of their large rituals as a weapon. They demanded tributes from their neighbours and took slaves from other cultures. It is little wonder that in the end they were sure that they could control the very nature of the Spring realm itself and harness the power of the Wanderer.

ON THE GREAT RITUAL

In this section are documents that explore the ritual that created the Vallorn.

First are sections of well-known ritual theory. Information on resonances and dissonances and particularly those of Spring magic – these are laws to which The Great Work would have had to conform and The Law of Intent, proof that the ritual did not ‘go wrong’.



Secondly an account of how Sadogua was likely involved in the creation and/or casting of the rituals.

And finally, a concluding Advisor’s Notes on the topic of the Great Ritual.

RITUAL THEORY

Resonance and Dissonance

Ritual magic is not limitless in scope and there are a number of fundamental laws that are common to all the realms, and certain limits that it cannot easily overcome. In addition to this, each of the six have strengths and weaknesses, referred to as *resonance* and *dissonance*. Where a realm is resonant with a theme, rituals that produce that outcome are easier to cast using that realm than any other. For example, the Spring Realm is resonant with healing magic, so rituals that heal the wounded are easier to perform using the Spring realm than any other realm.

Where a realm is dissonant with a theme, then it is much harder to create a ritual effect that produces that outcome, if it is even possible. For example, the Autumn realm is dissonant with healing magic, it can repair broken items and damaged buildings, but it has almost no ability at all to heal the wounded.

Some of the Resonances of Spring:

Venom

The Spring Realm resonates strongly with poison and venom of all kinds. Poison is the perfect natural weapon: both plants and animals use it, and poisonous creatures are found throughout the realm. No other realm rivals Spring's ability to poison or envenom someone else. Curse of Gangrenous Flesh is an example of a disease ritual - infesting the victim with a voracious sickness.

Like Day magic, Spring can be used to help a patient suffering from poison. However, where Day works by purifying and removing the taint, Spring magic causes the poison to course through the target's veins while simultaneously giving them the strength to survive it.

Savagery

The wild chaos of the Spring Realm lends itself easily to rituals that fill the target with wild passions, especially rituals that make the subject feel ruthless, bloodthirsty, and ferocious. Such rituals are often inextricably linked with the power needed to grant the strength and vitality. Many powerful Spring rituals to strengthen the target have unavoidable side-effects that cause the subject to

feel rage or similar reactions. Spring curses can force the victim to struggle with base urges like anger and greed.

Chaos

All Spring magic is chaotic and difficult to control, as it were trying to escape the caster. Some magicians have even poetically suggested that Spring magic wants to be cast, it just hates to be controlled. Whatever the nature of the Spring Realm, magic that draws on it all too often has unforeseen consequences. Perhaps as a result, wild natural phenomena resonate strongly with Spring: storms, gales, and floods are part of Spring, as are tremors and quakes. If a magician wants to unleash wild uncontrolled destruction over an area, then Spring magic is by far the most powerful choice.

Imperial lore does not include any rituals that create plagues, due to the inherent impossibility of controlling who is affected, but the Druj are known to possess magic of this kind.

Ruin

Spring magic finds it easier than other realms to destroy man-made things. Buildings can be torn apart with vines, collapsed with tremors or simply rot away. In part this reflects the power of the realm to cause all things to succumb to the natural process of decay - for instance dead bodies can easily be made to quickly decay using Spring Magic. In part it reflects the wild power of Spring magic, expressed through storms and tremors, as well as the limitless power of nature to consume everything given time.

Dissonances of Spring:



Control

Fine control is always difficult with Spring magic: it has a prevailing tendency to run amok. It is hard to aim a ritual with any accuracy beyond "what's in front of me". A storm will hit everything in a territory. A plague will quickly spread. A blessing of fertility may cause unlooked for side-effects such as increasing likelihood of being a brier.

Deference

Spring magic creates effects that encourage rebellion, independence and selfishness, as well as those associated with savage ferocity. The more targets at one time the worse it gets - enchanting an Imperial army with Spring magic is likely to encourage the army to bloodlust and disregard for authority. It is very poor for enchantments that encourage groups to cooperate and work together such as congregations, military units and armies.

Complexity

Complex concepts and ideas, especially social structures like trade, alliances, and relationships are also beyond Spring. Spring magic is ill-suited to anything that requires subtlety or this kind of complexity.

Subtlety

Powerful Spring magic lacks subtlety. It is direct and tends to overwhelm opposition rather than circumvent it. It doesn't gently erode a wall, it tears it down with animated vines. Curses won't make the victim feel on edge or unwell, they send them into fevered convulsions. Roleplaying effects create energy and passion.

Construction

Spring does not work well with objects made by mortal beings, either creating or restoring them. Living things can be healed - Spring magic can lend supernatural haste to the natural process of recovery - but it cannot repair broken objects. It might make a tree-branch into a temporary club or wind trees together to make a sanctuary, but restoring the unnatural craftsmanship of mortals to something that has been damaged is anathema.

Conformity and Stagnation

Spring magic can be wild and chaotic and it has a powerful tendency to cause these results even when they are undesirable. Because of this it is particularly poor for casting rituals that require things to conform, to grow more similar in nature or form. Spring magic hates stagnation and status quo. It is good at changing things but especially weak when trying to preserve things just as they are.

The Law of Intent

Sometimes called the first law of magic, the Law of Intent stipulates that a formulaic ritual can achieve only what the ritual was designed to do. Many magicians claim it is called formulaic magic for this very reason. The ability of Rivers of Gold to enhance the production of a business by 180 rings is the fundamental intent of the ritual. It is not possible to perform the ritual on a mine or a farm, nor to cast it with more mana crystals to get more money. The ritual can only be performed exactly as it was originally intended when it was formulated.

At first glance, spontaneous magic appears to offer a more flexible alternative, but the truth is that it is no more flexible than formulaic magic and often less so. Some variations can be part of a formulaic ritual, if the ritual is designed and constructed that way. When a magician creates a ritual projection to create a spontaneous effect, they must specify the intent of the ritual as exactly as possible. This can be much more demanding than an equivalent formulaic ritual - for example an arcane projection to divine the properties of a magical item would be useful only for that magical item.

The Law of Dominion

Authority over somebody or something creates a magical link that flows from the being with power to the subject of their authority. A general with command of an army, or any Imperial citizen who owns their own personal resource are both effective examples of the Law of Dominion. The Imperial regio is the most powerful expression of this law, providing as it does an arcane connection to every territory in the world that falls under the dominion of the Empire.

At the Winter Solstice of 383YE The Eternal Family coven asked Leviathan: *“Why did all eight Terunael cities feel sufficiently threatened at the same time to enact the Great Ritual?”*. The Eternal’s reply reflected the Law of Dominion – The Great Work was all or nothing. While the cities of Terunael were far reaching they were bound as one Empire. The magic could not affect only some cities, it would have to affect them all. So while Seren was not under threat it chose to stand in solidarity with the other cities of their empire that were on the verge of collapse.

SADOGUA AND THE VALLORN

The Reveal that Sadogua played a part in the creation of the Vallorn is a fairly recent one post Nicovar and came to light during Winter 380YE after the Iron Scroll Coven of Navaar worked with their member Cybi Farkas to ask the following question to Leviathan that he had proposed

“During the reign of Empress Teleri The Pious why was Sadogua placed under a Declaration of Enmity that lasted until 132YE”

For the purposes of record and to hold the Eternal Leviathan to account if required in the future. The full answer will be paraphrased here as it is important to the politic ongoingings of Teleri at the time as it is to the Vallorn as a whole.

The Account:

Leviathan opened with that he was not one to gossip about Sadogua for those who are aware this should be taken with a grain of salt. Leviathan has a long and well recorded dislike of the Eternal Sadogua and as a result the rest of this response could be compromised by the Eternals grievances, however there is a later piece of information that does back up this account is likely correct in the broadest strokes.

He inferred there were several reasons. Sadogua had been interfering with the Sevenfold Path, we know in recent times Sadogua was responsible for the death of Cardinal Ashur via desiring a true dose of liao. This sounds likely. He had been pushing to have more wizards declared Exemplars and Paragons much to the annoyance of those involved And lastly that Sadogua had tried to become a Paragon of Prosperity himself annoying others for similar reasons.

But the main reason he states was because Teleri had found out he had advised the Teruneal on how to take down the Druj and his response angered her.

Leviathans account states that Sadogua approached the Teruneal and highlighted he knew of a way they could resolve the situation. Leviathans account is very clear in one thing Sadogua did not hand the ritual text that created the Vallorn to them he did however act as a mentor and for all purposes a “bankroller” to help encourage it’s development.

Leviathans states “he supplied mana, he helped them write the Ritual text and finally he helped them make sure it could be cast”

Leviathan confirmed in his answer that the text he was referring to was the text that created the Vallorn. There was no ambiguity to this.

Teleri highlighted to him that had he made them aware this was going to be the case then he might “have avoided the wrath of the Navaar”.

Sadoguas response was it did not matter as they weren’t magicians and “I guess they learnt a lot about Spring Magic then didn’t they”.

She had him placed under Enmity in response and he states it’s only due to under the table dealings once Teleri had passed away that Sadogua was allowed back to the Empire.

This account appears to be backed up by Sadoguas actions in Winter 382YE in which he offered 3 rings “forged before there was an Empire” that had Spring magic within if the Empire condemned the choice of conclave to put him under Enmity during Teleri’s reign.

Any information that Sadogua may have brought to light is not known to the writer of this document and thus I would advise that information be found.

Conclusion:

I think it is important to bear in mind this account comes from an Eternal who has a grudge against Sadogua and although Sadogua’s later actions and offer would imply there is some truth to this account. Eternals should not be writing our history for us.

I would advise if possible an attempt be made to find any court records or diaries belonging to Teleri during this period so that we can see if there are human accounts backing this up, also we do not know how Teleri became aware of this development which is also important.

I also know that later historians will highlight that Sadogua didn’t make the Vallorn, only encouraged Teruneal to do so. I believe the Eternal needs to be held to account. If something could only exist as a result of your “aid” then you are as much responsible for its creation as those who cast the ritual. Sadogua created the Vallorn and let no political maneuvering attempt to tell the records of history otherwise.

Written in Wisdom and Loyalty,
Cybi Farkas



Advisor's Notes: On The Great Ritual

The creation of the Vallorn is called many things; The Great Ritual, The Great Work, The Great Mistake, The Accident. In stories it is often referred to as a ritual that 'went wrong', however that is not entirely the case. I have included parts of Imperial ritual theory above to prove that to be the case. Rituals do not go wrong; they do what they are supposed to do. This is the first aw of magic.

However, it is possible for a caster to misinterpret the end result of a ritual which is what I believe happened to the people of Terunael. In their certainty of their magical prowess that they believed they could control the end result of their workings.

They opened themselves up to the raw power of Spring and while they got the resonances they had hoped for in pure destructive power but did not account for the dissonances, it is not a power to be controlled.

Given the magnitude of the working it is unsurprising that an Eternal or Eternals may have been involved or consulted. It is up to us to deduce which ones and to what respect. Beyond Sadogua's advice (and potentially assistance) there are others to consider. Given Yaw'nagrah's love of the phenomenon it is possible she empowered the initial ritual though there is no proof of that as of yet.

ON FOUNDING OF A NATION

This section focuses on the time after the fall of Terunael and the formation of the nation of Navarr. It includes:

A Historical Treaties on the life of Navarr, a research document into the origins and life of Navarr written before the reign of Emperor Nicovar.

Navarr's Beginnings – a short insight into why Navarr's warnings about The Great Ritual weren't heeded.

The Skein of Years Vision from Thorn's Legacy. An account of the vision of Navarr and Thorn and their plans to undo the wrong that was the Vallorn.

The Hall of Rhonwen's Fall, a description of a vision provided by The Clear Lens of the Eternal River at the place where the Navarri nation was founded.

The Ritual Text of The Dance of Navarr and Thorn which details how the ritual works and its intent.

The Past Life Vision of Viviane de Coeurdefer. This description of a past life gives insight into a steading which agreed to join the nation of Navarr but ultimately disagreed with the approach of Navarr and Thorn in dealing with the Vallorn threat and instead sought an alternative.

A HISTORICAL TREATIES ON THE LIFE OF NAVARR

Originally compiled by Morfran Ravenswatch in 172YE. This document survived the scourge of Nicovar by being placed in Phaleron, The Celestial Library.

It is difficult, though not impossible, to gain information from the eternal but this usually involves knowing of the existence of the document to begin with. However, on rare occasion an Attendant (herald) of the library offers a favour; these favours are usually written on a thin sheet of ivory, and entitle the bearer to request a single piece of written information from any work to which the Attendant has access. Any attendant will honour one of these favours, and no additional price can be charged.

After years of collecting the histories and stories of the Navarr in Anvil and submitting them, with due Wisdom and discretion over dealing with an eternal, I (Sian Eternal) secured a favour from Phaleron. I was granted the ability to receive one biography from The Celestial Library. I consulted the heroes of Navarr on what to request as it was their tales that earned the favour.

Many great suggestions were made but as I could only choose one I decided to ask if the library had a biography on the founder of our nation. What I received was the following.

Abstract

This is a journal about the life of the creator of our nation, Navarr. As difficult as it may be it may be I will try to write this impartially so I can submit it to Phaleron. I realise that such is the nature of the library that where there is conjecture that I should mark it as such. To be clear there is very little information which can be checked on the life of Navarr. I have searched many records, and I can only find evidence on her life from the year after the fall of Terrunael to the completion of the Trod network. Most of the evidence I have is second hand records written up by historians earlier, but I hope that this will prove to be the most compressive report that I have promised Phaleron in return for his boon.

I will refer to Navarr by the feminine pronoun throughout this article since this is the most common assumption of her gender, although there is no evidence that I can find that she was female, it is just a commonly accepted myth, which is reinforced by preconceptions of scribes.

Navarr's Role in the Great Ritual

The Great Ritual, as it referred to in contemporary texts, is the definitive point in the life of Navarr. There are three key theories about her role in this. The first is that she was involved in the casting of the ritual. The second is that she was part of a resistance who was arguing against the casting of the ritual. The third is that she was present at the casting of the ritual, but was not in any position of power to influence the ritual. The third theory could be because she was a child at the time, or because she was a servant or slave of the ruling caste of Terrunael. What is supported by several sources, is the fact that she was at the casting of the ritual, most probably in one of the Northern Cities of the Empire, so Seren, Hacynian or Emrys.

An extract from the diaries of Pyre Blackroot is one of the more detailed sources from the time. If genuine then the Blackroot diaries are only fifty years from the fall of Terunnael, and although I am yet to find a full copy, what extract I have are a good source.

"I remember when my grandmother first told me -when she first met Navarr. It had been a year since the fall of the Great Empire and she had been walking from Tharunind for some time. I remember the stories that she told me of this journey, the strange growth of the plants that were overtaking all the outposts. Many thousands of people were slain, either by the strange plants ripping down the towers of the great cities or from the Druj, the foul Orcs that laid in wait for the refugees. I asked her to take my back to the clearing at Vale's Lament, where the met by one of the old boundary stones laid down by the mages of Terrunael, but the forests has grown too large in the years and it is seemingly impossible, even with the creation of the Trod network."

They were all there. Navarr was the centre of the attention of the crowd but around her were the most loyal of her of her disciples. Thorn, a skilled artificer and skilled tactician. Star, a powerful wizard skilled in the realms of Summer and Spring. Talon, a ferocious fighter who had slain many Orcs and finally Dusk, a healer and apothecary famed for their cures. My Grandmother told me that Navarr stood and spoke to the crowd, their voice carrying across the

clearing so all of them could hear it clearly. I have heard some people say that Navarr's words were so powerful that the wind themselves carried them to each person's ears. I love this story although as a student of the Autumn realm, I could cast such a ritual myself for the same affect.

Navarr told of the casting of the great ritual, how they had helped place the boundary stones around the furthest points of the city. The ruling council had said that the stones would protect the city from the power of the ritual. My Grandmother says that she remembered Magister Naliath saying the same thing to the people of her city before the casting of ritual in Therunind. Navarr told the crowd how they had looked in horror as the ritual had been cast. That had they been braver that they would have drawn a knife and stopped the ritual. My Grandmother told me that she had the same feelings that she had abstained in the vote and had not been able to make the decisions at the time, that she had listened to the council of the others and had not been brave enough to speak out.

My Grandmother told that there was no explanation of than Navarr's words must be true, that they had been at the casting of a ritual the same as my grandmother. But there was no guilt from Navarr, the crowds were told of the Great Dance. I wish that I had been alive to hear that story, to hear about the Great Dance for the first time. We live only a short time in each life, but it is important that we find the correct place in the Great Dance to make the most of it.

It was there where my Grandmother took the name Nightshade. There were many who asked her why she took the name of a poisonous root, although she would never tell them. I am sure that it was because she thought that she had killed so many and took that guilt to her grave. "

Pyre Blackroot. Grandson of Nightshade, she who was once Artificer Niryril of Hercyniand

Another account from the time is by Bradwr Gryphonstand. This account has been scribed several times and I have been unable to locate a copy of the original. There are obvious differences in different transcriptions and like many old texts the scribes have put their own interpretation on the words. The version I quote was written by the scribe Jestine Loststep.in 38YE, in the year of Empress Richilde.

“It was on that day I met the famous Navarr for the first time, outside the ruins of Beantal Dol. There she stood with her followers behind her. They were bloodied from the battles with the Druj tribe. We had been fighting them for the last six years and we knew their ways, although we had lost many in this time. We guarded her as her coven cast the ritual, calling the powers of spring to leech the corruption from the land. The sight moved me in a way I did not know was possible, she surely stood apart from others.

When the ritual was complete I told her of our plan. The remaining members of the Bronze Gryphon were to head to the Mountains of Urizen. They would not welcome us at first, especially after years of war, but we would petition to join their nation and create a citadel, to offer to protect their people as we had protected our own for so many years. We offered Navarr protection, to stay with us and avoid the horrors that were starting to come out of the ruins of the city. To protect her and her people from the Orcs that attack us daily. She did not accept.

That was the last I saw of Navarr. It is interesting that having only met someone twice, would have such a major effect on your life but such was her strength and purpose, especially from one so young.”

General Brawdwr Gryphonstand, transcribed by Jestine Loststep (38YE)

Of all the records that I can find , their most common feature is the mentions of her age and it is most likely that she was around fourteen to sixteen when Terruneal fell. There is a chance that she was just past her twentieth year, and therefore had some influence in the council, but records show that the Terrunael cities were ruled by a council. Two Ministers, Two Generals, Two Artisans – each representing different parts of their culture. It is unlikely that Navarr was on this council, and therefore could not have been involved in the decision to cast the ritual. That having been said, we are aware that Navarr was a powerful Spring mage and it is possible that she was involved in the casting of one of the rituals.

I find it unlikely that to cast the ritual of the magnitude that the Great Ritual was, that they did not combine all the Spring mages in their Empire to cast the ritual.

The obvious conclusion from this is that she was either of one of the powerful families of the Terrunael or she was a servant or slave. If she was a member

of the families then it is likely that she was involved in the casting, but if she was a servant or slave then she may well have known the plan to cast the Great ritual but with no ability to stop it. What is implied in various records is her obvious dislike of Terunael society. She, at no point, wanted to recover the Terunael Empire, but instead wanted to make sure that a society like that would not happen again.

The Building of the Trod Network

Although it is believed by many romantics that the Trod network was created by Navarr over a few years, the texts I have seen find this to be unlikely. The ritual text of the Dance of Navarr and Thorn explains that to cast the ritual is not enough, but instead a large number of Navarr have to walk the Trods to grow the spring magics.

“When Terunael was overrun, the orcs came as a great tempest and drove us apart. We could not walk the trods where the orcs sought us out. The coming of other people created its own problems as each sought to claim their own land and would not let us move across it freely. Only with the founding of the Empire were we able to walk the trods safely in numbers, further than ever before, and see in the distance a world where our ancestors' great mistake might finally be erased...

... While it could be performed in a territory that is not part of the Empire, doing so is of limited use because stridings simply cannot move freely enough in large enough numbers through the territory to bind the new trods into place. More so, without the freedom to move, the freedom to follow the trods where they wind, the trods are without purpose.

The trods could be traced across a territory controlled by an allied power, but only if that power were prepared to allow unrestricted access to large numbers of Navarr. There has been no time when a foreign power was prepared to offer such unfettered access to their lands, and certainly not on the kind of time-scales that would be needed to make newly forged trods effective.”

The Ritual Text of The Dance of Navarr and Thorn

I believe that Navarr’s greatest ability was not the ability to cast the Dance of Navarr and Thorn, but was to convince the refugees from Terrunael that they should change their life style and dedicate their life to walking the Trods, making amends to the acts of the their parents and sacrificing their future to destroy what they created. Navarr created the binding of Thorns, the oath that

binds all that follow her teachings. Thorn herself was the first that swore this oath and I surmise that this is why she took that name.

From the records that I can find, Navarr's journey was a long one, and look about thirty years. It is also well known that her Trods were not that effective. At the formation of the Empire, the Navarr were able to move in large numbers due to the safety of the Empire. It was this surge of power of so many walking the trods that allowed for the destruction of the Vallorn in Miaren.

Many people claim Navarr was a visionary; that she was building the Trod network in preparation for the coming of a new Empire. So when the Empire was formed then the Navarr would be able to walk it and to once again destroy the Vallorn. The followers of Navarr definitely walked the Trods, but it was a dangerous time and it was mainly protecting them from the Orcs that controlled the land. There would have been enough Navarr to tent to the Trods and stop them from breaking, for we know that if the Trods are not walked and cared for then they will surely cease working. It is hard to find out why Navarr wanted to create a Trod network that did not have the power to drain the power, although it is possible (although cynical) to believe that there is some other purpose for the ritual.

Since the formation of the Empire, the Conclave has requested for the Dance of Navarr and Thorn to be placed into Imperial lore twice. The Vate's council has both times attended on mass and explained that it will never happen. It is the sworn duty of all Vates to make sure that only they have the knowledge of the Dance. Should other nations get hold of it, then they would be able to use it for other purposes – to channel the Sprig magic to help their armies and to use the power of Spring as a weapon, maybe even awaking the Vallorn. The conclave is now aware that the ritual will never be in Imperial lore whilst the Vate oath is sworn.

Navarr and Thorn

There are many songs and poems that romanticise the relationship between the two. There is no evidence from any of the reliable sources that there was any romantic involvement between the two. Navarr is believed to have taken several partners during her life, and there are stories of children born of that union (although if this is the case she did not take any of the children on her journey with her.) The stories about Thorn speak of her loyalty to a single person, and although many believe that it was her loyalty to Navarr, the writings of Ffion Firstdance shed a different light up on it.

“Thorn’s loyalty to Navarr knew no bounds. They were rarely separated and when Navarr wished council it was Thorn who would deliver it. Of the two, Navarr was the more outgoing. People would flock to listen to Navarr’s words, and who in return would take the time to speak to all those they could, to tell of the mistakes of the Empire and the follies of the Great ritual and how people could make amends.

Navarr would oft wake in the night and Thorn would leave the bed letting their babe lie in arms to go and give Navarr council. But, Thorn would make sure he would return in morning for love is a powerful emotion, almost as powerful as loyalty itself.”

Ffion Firstdance, pre Imperial Writings

The Great Journey

It is possible to map the creation of the Trod network and from the records approximate the age of Navarr and therefore judge how long was spent in each place. We also know how which Trods have been created since the formation of the Empire, although there seems to be something about losing the land to the Orcs that means that after thirty years the ritual must be recast.

The records that speak of Navarr being young are from those around Miaren. There are several records of Navarr spending time around the Pool of Silver Clouds, and using their waters to guide herself or to guide others. There are some stories from Varushka from the time that tell of a young woman who could speak words and make the waters show people what she wished. It tells that she used this power to gain the loyalty of others and enlist them to give up their lives and walk in sorrow until they fell. In the Varushkan tales these are cautionary and speak of the woman as if she was a Sovereign, however, it is possible that their stories tell of Navarr and there are large parallels.

The Trods were then formed through Astolat and to Brocéliande. It is likely that this took almost ten years to create those Trods and to make sure that she had enough followers to defend them from the Orcs. It was in Brocéliande that there are stories of a major offensive on the Druj, pushing them back into the Barrens and forming the fortified steading of Carnstead there. Although there are several reports of the battles that took place in the Barrens, it is thought that Navarr did not go straight to Therunin and instead formed Trods through Reikos to hold Therunin.

From the writings that remain, it implies that Navarr was around the age of forty when she reached Therunin. It is interesting to note that if she was indeed

sixteen at the fall of Terunnael, then this journey took her twenty four years. I believe this was the harsh reality of what many people have romanticised. It was a life time's work that involved collecting refugees from Terunnael, fighting Orcs, building fortifications that could be guarded, and moving forwards. It is important to note that in many stories there are tales that the forests would form fortresses to stop the Orc's advances or the trees would attack the Orc armies before Navarr would move into a region. From reading sources from other nations from around this time, there are many who believed that Navarr knew the secrets of the Vallorn and had the ability to control the forest to do her bidding. Although this is possible, it is not probable. It is more likely that she had several Spring covens who she had taught and they used Spring rituals to create forests or to control the trees.

These rituals are unfortunately lost and do not seem to be in Imperial Lore, but there are many who are cautious about using Spring magic for anything other than its restorative properties that could possibly bring about the creation of a second Vallorn. My personal view is that this is driven by fear rather than understanding, but I can empathise why people may believe this.

It is thought that Navarr and Thorn then returned to Miaren, through Reikos and Casinea making sure that fortified wayhouses were placed upon the way. One of the stories tells that Navarr and Thorn took an old friend back to Miaren, to live their final days near their home. This tale implies credence to two facts, the first is that Navarr was younger than many of her companions, and the second was that she was not from Seren and from somewhere further north, since the stories tell of her wishing that she could one day return home.

The next part of the Journey seems to be quicker, although as Navarr was gaining in strength it is likely that more force and more covens were joining to her banner. Trods were created through Upwold, Mitwold, Mournwold and Bregasland. These Trods were the first to fall into disrepair after the offensive of the Jotun, destroyed many of the steadings in these lands and forced the Navarr to forests of Liathaven or Miaren.

It is important to note, that Military victory was difficult outside forested areas. It was the creation of large amounts of fortresses using the power of Spring that seemed to allow Navarr and her covens to protect themselves from the Orcs aggression and where the trods were created after this then there was less protection.

Some stories tell of a large citadel being formed in Reikos to stop Orc aggression, but there is no other mention of this magic and it is unlikely that this was due to the intervention of a powerful Summer mage and an Eternal,

maybe King Adamant or Cathan Canae. There are no mentions of any such castle in the lands between Miaren and Liathaven however, and this is the likely reason why those lands were lost.

It is likely that Navarr was in her late forties or maybe early fifties by the time she reached Liathaven. There are many stories of her time here, and especially around the earth trails of Liaven's Dance. What is interesting is there are no stories of her travels past this point, although we can speculate that she may have tried to travel northwards to Hercynia and onwards to Emrys, there are no stories that she ever reached them.

It was at the creation of the Empire that the great creation of the Trod network started, to all the reaches of the Empire. It is important to note that although Navarr is credited with the creation of the Trod network, this does not mean that she cast ever ritual. There are several rituals that were cast well after her death and I hope that if our Empire expands to take new territories then we shall see it cast in those as well.

Conclusion

The majority of Navarr's life is conjecture and myth. What scant sources we have are unreliable at best, and like many historical figures may acts performed later have been attributed to them. It is likely that Navarr was around at the time of the fall of the Terunael Empire and was instrumental at collecting together one prominent group of refugees, getting them to work together to defend territory from the Barbarian Orcs that controlled most of the land after the fall.

What is also interesting is although there are several mentions to the later lives of many of the other members of Navarr's entourage, there are no mentions or stories of Navarr and Thorn in their later lives and no mentions of their deaths. What happened to them, and how they met their demise seems to be a highly guarded mystery.



NAVARR'S BEGINNINGS

In many of the stories surrounding Navarr she voiced her concerns against The Great Ritual and rallied against it. It begged the question

“Why weren’t her warnings headed by the people of Terunael?”

In Autumn 381YE I asked Leviathan this question, to find out why or to find out if her being against the ritual was simply a thing of stories. The answer was simple. **“Because she was property”**.

The founder of the nation of Navarr was once a slave so it is little wonder that she didn’t strive to rebuild Terunael but to create an Empire to surpass it.

Sian Eternal.

THORN'S LEGACY

During the Anvil Vate Hunt of Spring 380YE the heroes of Navarr journeyed to Fever's Wake in Therunin. There, within a Winter regio, they found a stone egg encased in a solid container that could only be breached by casting six specific rituals, one for each of the realms. The egg itself empowers someone who is bound to it in the arts of Spring magic, it is also hallowed with an aura of Ambition, the ambition to connect all of the Vallorn hearts together using the trods.

More interesting still is the vision received when the ritual Skein of Years was cast on the egg. Below is the ritual first witnessed by Bledri Eternal, then the Eternal Family coven and finally thanks to an Arcane Projection "Witness to the End" was shown to gathered Navarri heroes at the Songs and Stories Circle in Anvil.

Two figures sit in a wood, between them sits a deerskin map. The details of the continent shown are unclear but the names of eight cities stand out clearly:

Terunel, Seren, Béantal Dol, Liath, Tharunind, Hacynian, Emrys, and Cavan.

The woman speaks. "Thorn, We need to join the cities again. All eight must be joined."

"Think upon it for a moment." The man replies quietly. "Are you aware of the consequences, this is why they destroyed the Trods after the casting of the great ritual"

"As always, I welcome your wisdom and counsel. You're right, the ritual should never have been cast.". She consents and he nods in agreement with her words. "But it was cast. They would not listen and cutting the link between the cities is not the answer. The Orcs have run for their lives, our people are safe, but at what cost? We have to deal with what we created"

"Navarr, it is not your Empire." Thorn warns "They would not listen to someone of your station. You are not to blame"

"I am not to blame, but I am responsible" she replies.

He shakes his head, they've had this argument before many times "We can use the Trods to bleed out the Spring Magic," he suggests "it will take hundreds of years but we can do it."

"This should not be. If we join the Trods, and awaken all eight, then it can be killed. It won't be easy, but we can destroy it!"

"With what armies?" Thorn questions "There are none left. either killed by the Orcs or by whatever was created by the Great Ritual"

"There will be armies, we just have to give our people faith, a purpose to unite behind, to rebuild a new Empire that is strong enough to fight"

He looks down at her words, slowly painting intricate designs on a stone egg. "I hope this works, how many times must we have this conversation?"

"Not many more," she assures him "Terunael will never be rebuilt, but one day there will be an Empire, governed by Wisdom not by Greed."

He places the stone egg into a small pouch and everything goes black.

THE HALL OF RHONWEN'S FALL

A first-hand account of a vision received of the founding of the nation of Navarr by Bledri Eternal. For more information on Rhonwen's Fall see page 173

We had gathered at Rhonwen's Fall to witness the opening of the locked doors behind the fall. On entering the hall I saw that the walls were covered in spiralling carvings that reminded me of the the patterns of the Trods. I was intrigued by this and the once in a life time opportunity to cast magic in this unknown hall.

Casting the Ritual Clear Lens of the Eternal River I cast my sight into the magic of the Day realm and the following is what I was able to witness in the Hall. The carvings had been there for an extremely long time. I did not witness their carvings but I could see others studying them and using them to inspire magics. I saw those that I believe were refugees from Terunael and they treated these carvings as ancient. I then saw visions of an even older time. Those I believe were from Terunael using the patterns to inform them of possible magics they could use to connect their cities. These carvings were in place I believe before Terunael came to their full power and they based the joining of their cities on these carvings.

Following the carvings and visions around the Hall I made my way slowly to the raised part of the Hall. It was here the visions changed. I saw a gathering of the refugees and two faces that I recognised from the Skein I received from Thorn's legacy. Here stood Navarr and Thorn the founders of our nation. They were talking to a woman who they called Star. She had taken the refugees from Serenael to this place of Sanctuary. Talking with Navarr and Thorn she interpreted the carvings and they came up with the plan to form the network of Trods to take the power from the Vallorn.



Bledri Eternal

I was then given the knowledge of one last thing in this place of significance. Thorn stood before Navarr and swore an Oath to her, an Oath I recognised as all Navarr would as the Binding of Thorns. This was where the first Oath of our Nation was sworn, by Thorn to Navarr to fight and defeat the Vallorn. This Hall carved with ancient carvings was the place where we founded our Nation. I could feel the power of these words and what it meant. The force was so strong it broke my magic and my sight through my crystal was cast back to the Hall as it was.

I was shocked by witnessing this sight. Something that I was sure no-one else had seen in my generation. This Hall was a sanctuary for our people. The place we were founded. The place we first swore our Oaths and started on the path we still walk.

RITUAL TEXT: THE DANCE OF NAVARR AND THORN

This text is a faithful transcription of that created by Nial Looks To That Day, who studied the original text of Erien Spring Dawn in Miaren.

A trod starts and ends with a vallorn. We wove the trods as a weapon but in the fullness of time they gave life to the land through which they passed, and strength to those who travelled them. As our stridings migrate along the trods, so the wild magic at the heart of the vallorn is leached away. The longer the trod and the larger the striding, the more strength each journey leaches. As the wild magic is drawn away, it infuses the land around the trods and makes them fertile.

When Terunael was overrun, the orcs came as a great tempest and drove us apart. We could not walk the trods where the orcs sought us out. The coming of other people created its own problems as each sought to claim their own land and would not let us move across it freely. Only with the founding of the Empire were we able to walk the trods safely in numbers, further than ever before, and see in the distance a world where our ancestors' great mistake might finally be erased.

This ritual is most useful in a territory that has never been part of the Empire. Today, this almost always means barbarian territories conquered by the Imperial armies. A new territory expands the reach of the trods as a whole and helps weaken all the vallorn tied to those trods. Extending the reach of the trods so they cover a greater distance than ever before significantly increases their effectiveness.

Where the Empire has lost control of a territory to the barbarians, it becomes harder to use the trods and they may fray or fade. If a territory were in barbarian hands for more than a decade, the ritual would be needed to repair the trods to return them to full strength. Doing so extends the reach of the trods a little, and may result in a burst of power drawn from the vallorn, but the exact effects are difficult to predict.

The Barrens in particular seem problematic. Trods have been established there twice with the aid of our Dawnish friends at Drycastle – once in 75YE and once again in 245YE. In both cases, the trods have unravelled over the course of a few years. Some few trods are still intact but they are of minimal value in drawing the power of the Vallorn and dangerous to walk. It may be that the

Druj are to blame, because those orcs have always been strong there and jealous of other magics. It may be that there is a force there – perhaps the dark spirit of the Great Forest of Peytaht – that actively unpicks our trods. If any vate knows, they have not shared their wisdom.

While it could be performed in a territory that is not part of the Empire, doing so is of limited use because stridings simply cannot move freely enough in large enough numbers through the territory to bind the new trods into place. Moreso, without the freedom to move, the freedom to follow the trods where they wind, the trods are without purpose.

The trods could be traced across a territory controlled by an allied power, but only if that power were prepared to allow unrestricted access to large numbers of Navarr. There has been no time when a foreign power was prepared to offer such unfettered access to their lands, and certainly not on the kind of time-scales that would be needed to make newly forged trods effective..

The magic of this ritual draws on the power of patterns and to a degree that of tattoos and brands – it can be imagined that the trods are symbolic tattoos on the face of the earth. It is not a requirement that the ritual be performed by vates, however - any coven could perform the magical working necessary to form the trods. In practice, the creation of trods would be pointless without the support of the Navarr - no other Imperial nation has a nomadic population in sufficient numbers, or is as committed to tracing and re-tracing the trods over the time scales involved in teasing out the malign power of the vallorn.

We do not really know whether the ritual creates the trods in response to the intent of the ritualists, or reveals trods that already exist. Some magicians say that there is no difference – that the ritual both shapes the trods and reveals them in the same way that the best sculptors both shape and are guided by the wood or stone that they use. Regardless, attempts to create trods in straight lines, or specific designs, have proved to be impossible and attempts to guide the trods away from locations that are dangerous or inconvenient have likewise been unsuccessful - the trods go where they want to go.

Less mystically minded magicians describe the process of drawing out the trods to be like guiding the path of a river - the water can be encouraged to flow in a certain direction, but it cannot be made to flow up-hill or to take one path when another offers less resistance.



Trods do not extend across very large bodies of water, such as the Bay of Catazarr. The sea is hungry, deep, full of currents that scoff at the idea of permanence. As a river dies when it reaches the sea, so the trods will not long survive exposure to the corrosive ocean. Lakes, major rivers or areas of swamp and marsh provide no particular obstacle as evidenced by the paths that cross the marshes of Therunin.

Water is a good metaphor for our trods. They ebb and flow as we move along them; we are both carried by the current and draw the wild magic behind and around us. They are a dance – the steps drawn on the face of the earth but we the dancers give meaning to their design. Without the design, our movements have no weight. Without the movement, the design is just a drawing. Intent creates the pattern. Intent draws and channels the wild chaos of the vallorn from it's heart and tames it, spreads it to the four corners.

Once the wild chaos is tamed, then we may move against the vallorn itself. The beasts that live on the body of the vallorn and breath it's tainted air secure it in place. They are the dancers, while the vallorn is the design. It is never swift, but when we have drawn enough power we can strike to clear the vallorn from a place. It will not return to that place without malevolent intent of another being. This is how we claimed Miaren, one careful step at a time. It is patient work – the vallorn is stronger the closer we come to the HEART, and more vicious. It may be that to weaken several vallorn is easier than to eradicate one,

and when the time comes we must choose carefully. Only when all the taint has been cleansed from a territory is the vallorn truly gone from that place.

It is not enough to kill the vallornspawn alone, for the wild magic returns and twists new creatures. It is not enough to walk the trods alone, for like an anchor the vallornspawn hold the taint in place. Both dancer and dance, both thorn and trod, both are required to destroy a vallorn.

This ritual has never been part off Imperial Lore. We brought it before the Imperial Conclave only once, in the first years of the Empire. The magicians chose not to include it at that time because it was seen as being of limited use to anyone outside the Navarr nation. When the Imperial borders were sealed in the time of Emperor James the number of vates who had mastered it dwindled. We should have been more careful to keep knowledge of it alive, but in truth the number of covens who could perform it has always been small.

If the target territory contains a vallorn, the ritual allows that territory to be joined to nearby land to create a network of trods, so that they can be used to begin drawing the power of the entity away. The wider the network of trods that the vallorn is connected to, the more effective they are at leeching power from it. If a new vallorn were uncovered, the first step towards eroding it would be to connect it to the existing Empirewide network of trods that we already use.

In theory, if some power were to significantly damage the trods in a territory, this ritual might be used to repair them. Doing so would not require as much power as forging the trods from scratch, but would likely still be challenging. If the trods in a territory were damaged sufficiently, it is likely that they would slowly erode or unravel. While the damage is very unlikely to spread beyond the borders of the territory where the damage has taken placed, the loss of an entire territory from the trod network might severely impede the ability to draw the energy from one or more of the vallorn.

The ritual usually involves a map of the territory on which the trods are traced as the ritual is performed. We often have used blood to trace the trods on parchment. Some create a symbolic map of the territory on a large scale and move across it with trails of coloured sand. Representatives of as many different stridings as possible are usually included in the performance, along with representatives of any steading that already exists or plans to settle in the target territory.

The vates of Hercynia suggest that the runes of beginning, dominion and the twin-faces of mystery will help in the performance of the ritual. Some vates of Therunin who have congress with the Urizen suggest that the constellations of the Fountain, the Three Mothers, the Mountain of the Chain may help. A ritual re-telling of one of the great dances, especially that of Navarr and Thorn may form the centrepiece of the ritual.

Past Life Vision of Viviane de Coeurdefer as recounted in a letter to Siân Eternal in Late Winter 383YE

Morwen Bitterroot, from a Striding in Elerael, brought only the essentials with her into the Day chamber. The Pauper's Key to let her through, a few scrapings of copper ink in a vial, a clay bottle with the word 'mahu' embossed into it, a Hallowed knife – what's a Thorn without a knife, after all – and nothing else.

The chamber was clean, faded and open; a table to her left as she came through the Regio, with an urn holding something glowing softly purple centred on it, and in front of her, a circle maybe three metres across, chalked in white and marked around with maybe twenty candles flickering in the non-existent breeze. Some of them were unlit, but the pattern it made was meaningless to her compared to the steady, fast-paced beat the creature on the far side of the circle drummed out, and the flailing, frantic dancer twirling within the circle, near exhaustion and crying out for help.

“Please, have you come to take my place? Help me – I don't know how long I can carry on...”

The Hallowing pulsed gently under her fingers. Do what's necessary, no matter how hard it is. The creature opposite – a Herald, Merrow-like, in white robes and a blue tagelmust – spoke almost disinterestedly. “She bears different brands to yours.”

Morwen was a stranger to the lass in front of her; and Enfys Cariad's Eye choked out her story in pieces as she whirled and struggled through her dance. Cariad, she cried, was a contemporary of Navarr and Thorn. She'd disagreed with the Nation's founders, and thought of a different way to protect those of Terunael. She set up this ritual, dancing alone and calling one of her Steading to follow after her when it was too much – and Ylenrith had accepted. The Pure Swan had held back the Vallorn, creating an eye of the storm as one of each generation of Cariad's Eye danced for her; creating an oasis of peace and unchanging safety for at least a century. And the cost, beyond the dancer: only that all the energy the Vallorn would have spent on Cariad's Eye was thrown outwards, twisting the rest of Terunael into greater chaos and corruption.

None of the people in the Chamber knew why the next dancer from Cariad's Eye had failed to come yet; but Morwen was here, and Enfys was exhausted. All she'd have to do to protect the Steading was brand herself with new tattoos. All she'd have to do is give up the Great Dance for this little one; give up the greater goal for a tiny pocket of stillness.

She didn't need a knife for this ending. She promised Enfys to remember the story, and tell the tale; and snuffed out the candles. Enfys' screams echoed through the Chamber, and the memory faded.



Advisor's Notes: On the Founding of a Nation

Songs and stories tell us of how Navarr and Thorn were partners who died to create the trod network as we know it today but a great deal of poeticism has been applied to the few facts that have endured the years.

The truth however is that while Navarr and Thorn gave their lives to start putting the trods back in place it was in the far more practical sense of a devotion of years rather than them dying. We now also know that the trods were not a new idea, they had once connected the Terunael cities, perhaps just for swifter travel or there may have been more to it. Navarr and her companions however saw the potential of the connected Vallorn hearts to leech the Spring magic away.

We also do not know the precise relationship between Navarr and Thorn – they were unarguably partners in the Great Dance but it would be foolish to assume they were romantic partners (especially given how Navarr's youth is commented upon but Thorn's is not) No matter the nature of their relationship they were clearly devoted to one another and their shared cause. This is why Thorn was first to swear to the new nation and its ideals and why to this day anyone who joins the Navarr speaks an oath in his name.

The Binding of Thorns now varies between individuals, oaths are deeply personal, but one factor remains the same in each and every binding – an unwavering promise to fight the Vallorn. We now know that the eight Vallorn sites must be connected and we must coordinate strikes against it as an Empire, one of Wisdom and not of greed.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT HISTORY

This section is a collection of other findings surrounding the historical fight against the Vallorn. Included are the following:

Historical Research on Megan Blackblood, a talented vate with extreme theories on fighting the Vallorn. While much of her outlook was unwise she was wellstudied on the subject of the Vallorn.

Historical Research on Rhonwen's Fall, once called Sanctuary Falls and renamed in honour of the Archmage who used Wither the Seed on the Seren Vallornheart helping the Empire defeat it for good. The falls have a long and significant history.

The Past Life Vision of Empress Lisabetta, who was Earl Nimue de Gauvain and was General of the Golden Sun present at the assault on the Seren Vallornheart.

Historical Research on Abraxus Stones, one of the most useful items that an artisan can craft when it comes to fighting against the Vallorn.

Historical Research on Charter Stones and Singing Stones. Initially inspired by the Past Life Vision of Father Drakov this research focuses on large stones of note, specifically Singing Stones.

Past Life Vision of Jericho of the Suns of Couros who was Enthis Firstdance, a devoted thorn who defended a Singing Stone.

I have also added some Advisor's Notes at the end of this section.

THE LIFE OF MEGAN BLACKBLOOD

This document was compiled by the civil service in response to a request for historical research announced and approved by Merel Pathfinder, Advisor on the Vallorn, early in his tenure in that position. It was published shortly before the Winter Solstice 381YE, with his permission.

Early Life

According to a letter she wrote to a friend in Miaren in 104YE, the child Megan was born in 77YE during the reign of Empress Teleri. Her parents were part of Quiet Clay (*The Quiet Secret Hidden in the Red Clay*) Steading in western Therunin. Raised on the shores of the Feverwater, her steading cultivated a section of forest spotted with rich deposits of dragonbone in southern Eastring. She describes her childhood as "*typical; I climbed and ran with the other children, got into trouble, was once almost eaten by a monstrous insect horror out of the Greenheart – typical, as I said.*"

Typical as she might consider her youth, it was clear from an early age that she was fascinated by the Great Dance. She studied occasionally with the vates who passed through her steading on their long migration along the trods, and at fourteen decided to travel with members of one particular band, the Slow Spiral striding (*The Long Slow Spiral That Curves Outward From The Heart*). She showed little aptitude for the work of the magician, however, and while she obviously felt drawn to a life of service, at the age of seventeen she chose a different path.

The long peregrinations of the Slow Spiral lead them to Liathaven, where Megan settled for a time in the Black Blood steading (*The Song That Draws The Black Blood From The Earth*). Located in Liaven's Glen. There she studied with several guides, learning to focus her intellect and intuition and exploring the many pitfalls that surround the life of the guide.

During this time, she demonstrated a clear fascination with and affinity for the series of trails and earthworks known as Liaven's Dance. The twisting trails, ditches, mounds of earth and weathered cairns were an early working designed to weaken the power of the vallorn. Many Navarr scholars consider Liaven's Dance to have been an early attempt at creating the trods that today criss-cross the entire Empire. She would regularly disappear for days or weeks on end, exploring the paths and meditating next to the cairns and mounds.

As she gained in confidence, she ventured further afield, spending several years exploring the marshes of Bregasland and the Mourn in particular. She founded the Green Loom Striding (*The Shuttle Weaves Across the Green Loom*), and began to practice her calling on the Marchers, helping them to find their places in life. During this time, she encountered the man who would later become her life-mate, the Marcher Landskeeper Bran of Alderley.

Landskeeper Bran was increasingly dissatisfied with his life in the Mournwold, and fascinated by Megan's stories of life among the Navarr. Eventually, he left his home village to accompany Megan on a long pilgrimage across the Empire from west to east, looking for a new home.

The Weirwater Campaign

In 131YE, Megan and Bran of Alderley were caught up in a campaign against Druj insurgents in the Dawnish territory of Weirwater. Fighting under the banner of the Shadow Wasp, the Druj invaded Weirwater with a flotilla of great rafts launched across the Semmerlak. The Druj were led by a powerful ghulai and her coven, who wielded the power of Spring magic against the Imperial defenders.

As a Navarr who had studied with vates, accompanied by a small band of Navarr thorns and a Marcher master of Spring magic, Megan's group quickly found themselves as special advisors to the Dawnish forces there. The Navarr scouts provided valuable assistance, and the magic wielded by Bran of Alderley was especially effective at countering the use of venom against the Dawnish knights. Despite initial victories, the Shadow Wasp were slowly pushed back eastward, trapped between the Imperial forces and the lake shore.

As the Druj fell back it was clear they planned to take to their rafts and flee. The Navarr suggested another plan – while they couldn't perform the magic themselves, they knew of the ritual Foam and Spittle of the Furious Sea. With the assistance of the Spring Archmage and three covens of Dawnish weavers, the Semmerlak was transformed into a short-lived maelstrom of devastating storms, waterspouts and whirlpools. Great waves battered the shore for three days and when the storm cleared, the Druj rafts were shattered to splinters giving them no chance to retreat.

In retaliation, and neither seeking nor expecting any quarter from the Dawnish knights, the Druj expended the last of their magical power to raise the forests of Weirwater against the Empire – they unleashed the Thunderous Tread of the Trees.

The devastation was remarkable. The great trees of some of the oldest forests in Dawn marched against the town of Culwich, smashing several smaller villages. The Dawnish had little option but to take defensive positions and try to weather the onslaught, while simultaneously harrying the Druj forces before they could retreat towards Karsk.

Megan observed the catastrophic release of Spring magic, and remarked on how easily the non-Navarr soldiers mistook the attack for being that of a Vallorn. She and her Navarr companions repeatedly explained that the trees were unleashed by Spring magic, were not vallornspawn. In the end, the common soldier seemed unable to tell the difference – they had heard of the malign force at the heart of the Navarr forests, and simply assumed that any horror of this nature must be connected.

Despite the supernatural attack of the forests. The Dawnish forces scattered the Druj armies, slaughtering the Ghulai and her coven, and effectively destroying the Shadow Wasp. The Navarr of Green Loom striding were commended by Empress Varkula for the aid they offered the Dawnish, and Bran of Alderley was gifted with the magical staff he wielded for the rest of his life by the Weavers of Weirwood, as thanks for his assistance.

The Moving Forest

Her experiences in Weirwater prompted a period of introspection and discussion between Megan and several vates. By this time, she and Bran of Alderley had sworn oaths of love and companionship, bound as wife and husband, and Bran officially became Bran Green Loom. The pair became a regular presence at the meetings of the Nations at Anvil, using this as an opportunity to spread the philosophy of the Navarr in the Synod and the Conclave.

Despite her lack of training in ritual magic, Megan sought the assistance of the Dean of the Lyceum, a Navarr magician named Idris Adder Storm, in codifying a ritual based on her observations in Weirwater.

She suggested that it might be possible to use the same magical energies that empowered Thunderous Tread of the Trees to infuse the vegetation in an area infested by the vallorn and unleash them on the enemies of the Empire.

Her theory was based around several observations. She noted that even though the trees unleashed in Weirwater were chaotic and destructive, they did not

stray beyond the borders of the Dawnish territory. Bran explained this by referencing the Marcher concept of boundaries and the delineation of land, while Megan drew parallels with the way patterns and designs could often be described in terms of the empty space they surrounded or contained. Unleashing the vegetation in a forest claimed by the vallorn should likewise mean that the vallorn did not venture beyond the boundaries of the territory in which they grew. They could be controlled – for a given value of control.

Further, when the ritual in Weirwater ended, the trees began to move back to the location where they had previously been rooted, coming as close as possible to their original homes. If this were true of the vallorn vegetation, there would be little or no chance of such a ritual accidentally spreading the vallorn taint into areas that had been reclaimed already.

Finally, she suggested several benefits to this magic. Vallorn vegetation is incredibly resilient to attacks from weapons and fire. They are often home to monstrous insects, and Megan cautiously suggested that rather than attacking the insects directly, the vallorn vegetation would ignore them – but the creatures themselves might follow 'their' trees into battle.

The magicians of the Conclave were horrified by the suggestion that they tamper with the Vallorn. Megan, calmly practical, refuted their claims that it was madness to meddle and explained that whatever else it was, the vallorn must be bound by the same laws as everything else in the world. While then ability to use vallorn vegetation against the enemies of the Empire was of limited use, she theorised that it could be especially effective at removing barbarian orcs from Brocéliande or Therunin, or even from Hercynia or Liathaven.

Critics suggested that the vallorn vegetation would be equally dangerous to Navarr steadings as to enemy forces, and Megan countered by pointing out that the trees raised by Thunderous Tread tended to expend their wrath on fortifications and large concentrations of troops rather than steadings which often have low populations – while some villages were destroyed in Weirwater, her argument was that in the long term the damage to the Dawnish yeomanry was less than it would have been had they just been conquered by the Druj.

Needless to say, the Dean and the Conclave alike were horrified by her suggestion and refused to countenance further research. Megan launched an

ill-fated declaration of candidacy for the title of Dean, and narrowly avoided being declared a sorcerer after she was soundly defeated.

Despite her work being largely theoretical, she was left with an enduring reputation of being a dangerous lunatic. In much the same way that the soldiers of Dawn seemed unable to distinguish between the Spring-magic motivated trees and the stories of the vallorn, the magicians of the Conclave seemed unable to distinguish between a plan to harness a dangerous power for the benefit of the Empire and the insane desire to unleash the vallorn across great swathes of land.

Later life and death

Her reputation destroyed, Megan returned to Black Blood Steading with her husband. The pair of them had three children, and lived in relative obscurity. Both maintained ties with the Marches, and were regular guests at Mournstead and Turning Spiral Steadings. The pair made a long study of the Liathaven vallorn, but no copies of their study could be located.

Megan died in 152YE, and her husband Bran died a year later.

After their deaths, a box containing extensive notes and experimental records was delivered to Turning Spiral by their youngest child Linden Black Blood. The documents concerned the continued efforts of Bran Black Blood to codify a ritual that would animate vegetation in a region corrupted by the vallorn and use it as a weapon against the enemies of the Empire.

The documents themselves were presented as a gift and legacy, intended to become part of the archives of the Steading. In the end, after discussion with fellow vates and a delegation of Highborn and Urizen that gathered at Turning Spiral to discuss the issue, the documents were destroyed. Tam Turning Spiral, the leader of the Turning Spiral coven, made an address before the Conclave in which he said that while the notes were nowhere near complete they represented a “dangerous seed from which a catastrophe might grow.”

HISTORICAL RESEARCH RHONWEN'S FALL

Presented here is the initial Historical Research. Since its initial publication the details have been edited and expanded. Included below the original document are the sections of the research that saw the most changes.

A collection of documents on Rhonwen's Fall, in Miaren

Collated by Albus Thornspire, 381YE

The documents I have found are the most accurate that I can recover about Rhonwen's Fall, however, they do contradict themselves. The issue with looking at pre-Imperial history is that a lot of the writing is based upon conjecture. There are little writings remaining from that time and what we had were destroyed in the reign of Emperor Nicovarr.

I have tried to annotate where possible, although after my recent ordeals I apologise that I have not been as thorough as I would like to be under normal circumstances.

Rhonwen and the Vallorn

In the early years of the Empire, with the assistance of their new allies, the Navarr launched a major offensive into the territory surrounding the Terunael city known as Seren. A combination of the (relative) peace wrought by the nations that would become the Empire, followed by their unification, had allowed the trods to expand more than at any time since their initial creation. Increased security and the protection of the Imperial law allowed the Navarr stridings to travel the trods in greater numbers than ever before in their history.

The time being right, the Navarr engaged on one of their most ambitious projects to date. Specifically, the attempt to reclaim an entire territory from the vallorn. The central city of Seren was chosen because of its location. Since the trod network was completed, Seren had benefitted the most from the slow leeching of the vallorn's power and was judged to be ripe for liberation.

The vate Rhonwen helped to lay the groundwork fifteen years before the first major offensive. A quiet, introspective woman afflicted with profound deafness from birth, she nonetheless became an adept wielder of ritual magic – and archmage of Winter on three occasions.

She put forward a theory that the vallorn energies were nothing more than a massive, hitherto unknown, regio of the spring realm. Her theory was extremely radical – she theorized further that the problem was the relationship between this magical energy – this super-regio – and the plants and animals that lived inside it. She pointed to the way that Winter regio were known to spontaneously coalesce around battlefields and burial grounds. While not all Winter regio occupied such locations, there was almost always a connection between the area where the regio occurred and the resonances of the realm it was connected to. Indeed, eternal had been known to be capable of actively exploiting these connections for centuries, and several were known to offer boons relating to the creation of regio (most especially Prospero, Sadogua, Sorin, and Yaw'nagrah).

She believed that the anchoring effect of the vallorn was tied to the fertility and vitality of the creatures in the area, just as it reinforced and heightened those qualities. Her plan was relatively simple – she and her coven would invoke the ritual known as Wither the Seed in Seren, provided an appropriate regio could be located. In the end, Rhonwen prevailed upon one of the eternal of Winter – believed to be either Sorin or possibly Kaela – for a boon relating to the

temporary creation of a strong winter regio in the heart of the area now known as Rhonwen's Fall. Her coven – the Silent Word – and a cadre of thorns managed to secure the area and evoke the regio. They performed the ritual, but were overwhelmed by ettercaps and a veritable army of vallornspawn husks – some clearly dating back to the fall of Seren itself.

The ritual had the usual effect, but it is not clear how much benefit this was to the eventual campaign to reclaim Seren. Indeed, some historians point out that the ritual effects lasted for a further decade after the territory was reclaimed, and may have been responsible for the slow speed of the Navarr rebuilding there. Worse, it robbed the Navarr of a powerful and influential figure who might have helped them arrange the campaign against Seren earlier had she been around. Historians do agree that her ritual had an effect – the ettercaps were sluggish and slow to respond to the initial Imperial invasion of the territory, at the very least, allowing the human armies to liberate an additional region before they (and the other vallorn beasts) were fully roused to murderous fury.

Sanctuary Falls

Rhonwen's Fall was originally known as Sanctuary Falls and has been a key location in Miaren since the fall of the Terrunael Empire. When Seren fell, historical accounts suggest that it was at Sanctuary Falls where the majority of refugees went. Sanctuary Falls is built into cliffs behind the waterfalls of the Gancio River, and it is almost impossible to see the caves from the bottom of the cliffs. The path to the caves are narrow and winding and can be easily guarded (although easily blockaded too) and it is a defensible position that can be trapped or protected by archers. There are reports that more than once the pathway has been flooded to make entrance to the caves totally impassable.

It is well known that the cliffs around Sanctuary Falls contain intricate swirling designs that are thought to contain some insight into the creation of the Trod network. There are many modern Navarr who believe that these were carved by their founders, Navarr and Thorn, who travelled to Sanctuary Falls before the creation of the Trod network. There is no evidence, that this is the case however. There are some accounts from Terunael documents (what few we have) that many of the carvings were in place well before the fall of their Empire. There are also no reports that Navarr or Thorn travelled to Sanctuary Falls, although there are very few records from the time of Navarr to make it possible to know if this is true.

There are, however, documents that a powerful vate by the name of Star¹ travelled from Seren to Sanctuary Falls. It is believed that Star was the daughter of a powerful magister (one of the ruling council of the Terunael cities) and when the city started to fall she was asked to take those she could (especially the younger citizens) to Sanctuary Falls to keep them safe from the Orcs who were attacking Miaren at the time.

What few documents there are about the history of Star tell of Rhonwen's Fall and it is believed that she carved several of the newer markings on the cliff faces during her time there. There is archaeological evidence that both Druj and Jotun were prevalent in the area at the time, although from what we know of them at the moment it is unlikely that they were working together to invade Miaren. Although it is known that Star joined with Navarr upon their journeys and was instrumental in the using of magics to hold back the Barbarian Orcs,

¹ It is unlikely that the Vate's name was Star – this is more likely an honourific based upon the meaning of Seren which seems to translate from Iaith to Star.

often by creating fortresses of living wood or to envenom the weapons of all those who would fight beside them,

There are records that Star returned to Sanctuary Falls several times and it is even thought that she died there, although any investigation into her life from the falls has been met with resistance from the Navarr over that time. It is unknown why, although it is more recently claimed that all records from her life have been lost.

Since the fall of Seren, then Sanctuary Falls has been used as a Steading or a place of sanctuary for Stridings in times of danger or over winter. It is thought that over the years the simple caves have been excavated and the steadings there have secret chambers and libraries that run back hundreds of years. There is a saying that “Sanctuary will keep you safe when the waters run red”² which is an obvious reference to the Orcs slaughtering the people of Miaren and them taking sanctuary in the caves.

² There could be a more literally meaning of this staying referring to the literally running red of the water every 90 years.

The carvings on Rhonwen's Fall

Looking at the carvings on sanctuary falls there seem to be twelve key points that are marked upon the cliffs, joined by a complex pattern of spiral carvings. Of these twelve points there are eight that are marked more deeply, with more complicated carvings between them. Although there are rumours that these were carved by Navarr and Thorn, they are of a variety of ages and only the most recent carvings seem to relate to the time at the fall of Terunael, the rest seem a lot older. It would be fair to surmise that there are older carvings that Navarr and Thorn used and deciphered to understand the magics and create the Trod network.³

The most commonly held theory is the points relate to twelve or eight vallorn hearts. It is possible that there are four lost cities or four dormant Vallorn hearts, although this is purely conjecture. There are eight vallorn hearts that were aware of (if we include the destroyed heart in Seren), the five within the Empire, one in Thule lands to the North and one in Beantel Dol ruled by the Druj. There are several theories or reports about a sunken Vallorn heart off the Cazatar Bay.⁴

Several scholars have tried to map the carvings onto a map of the Empire but in doing so there are problems where they do not line up with where we know the Vallorn hearts in the Empire are and it is not possible to map the Trods using this methods.

A little known account from 176 YE tells of the Vate, Siriol Leafstalker, who claimed to have be able to map the markings on Rhonwen's Fall to a map of the Empire. Siriol had worked with a group of Urizen Stargazers to predict changes in the Spring Realm over time, and the mapping of the Vallorn hearts under this algorithm was accurate to fifty miles within the Empire. Siriol was declared a Sorcerer in 179 YE by the conclave and her theories were widely discredited.

³ Other reports imply that it was Star that did the carving rather than Navarr, although it is hard to cohabate these accounts.

⁴ I can find no evidence that there is a sunken heart in the Cazatar Bay.

It is not known if the full details on her theories were lost in the reign of Nicovarr or deliberately destroyed by the Conclave, but second hand reports show that it was believe that she believed that the three points not in the Empire were to be found in Otkodov, The Mallum and The Broken Shore. The mapping of the four other points using Siriol's theories showed the other four markings to be mapped in Narkyst, The Lassambrian Hills, Axos and The Vore

The Fall running Red

Records from the time when the Silent Word performed their ritual at Rhonwen's Fall were that the waterfall ran with blood. Here is one of the contemporary accounts of the event.

“As Rhonwen took her stand, the host of the Vallorn came from the Forests. Almost a thousand husks came from the heart of the Forest. As they marched up the narrow path, led by a host of foul ettercaps. As they pushed forwards through the mouth of the Fall, the brave defenders took down many. Vates called the powers of Spring to make their staves drip with venom whilst spear and bow felled a multitude of the host. All those who watched from the shadow of the Fall saw at that moment as the clear waters of the Fall turned a dark red and blood started to run down the mouth of the caves.”

There have been many followers of Rhonwen over the years who have stated that this was a miracle, and one of the signs that Rhonwen should be declared an Exemplar.⁵ The opponents to this have either argued that this is a magical affect from the Winter Realm or the more cynical have put this down to coincidence with impurities from the Orichalcum mines that are at the top of the Fall. It was generally accepted that the bleeding that was seen during Rhonwen's ritual was due the Orichalcum, and this has occurred three times since in known history.

In the rule Empress Aenea there was a report of the Fall bleeding. Although it was heavily debated whether this was due to the Orichalcum,, the conclave sent a small group of skilled mages including the Spring Archmage, Badden Eternal and the Winter Archmage Enchanter Blaihot of House Bascombe of Dawn. The two were close friends, and spent some time investigating the fall. The next season, the two archmages were summoned to the conclave to explain what they had seen and what had happened there. Both archmages were highly respected and their actions took many of the conclave by surprise. When ordered by the conclave to speak of their findings they refused to speak of anything they had seen or heard there and after several hours of arguing including declarations of sorcery being placed against them both and challenges from several other mages for their roles. Their reputation was such that the declarations of sorcery both failed and their positions as archmages looked secure. It was thought that they Synod was planning on condemning

⁵ Liberation, Recognition, Benevolence, Inspiration, Miracles, Pilgrimage, Salvation, Legacy.

them and pushing towards excommunication and so they eventually stepped down, refusing to contest their positions.

In the years that followed, Badden formed a wayhouse in Miaren where he settled down and tended to the needs of any who were passing. It is said that Blaihot returned to Dawn and removed himself from active life, although his daughter became a highly successful general. There were, however, rumours that her success was due to the fact that the Eastern Sky was always backed up by a host of undying spirits summoned by her father.⁶

The second time that there were reports of the Fall bleeding was in the Interregnum before Emperor Nicovarr and Empress Marlika. The senator of Miaren at the time was a Merrow Broker by the name of Leri Ravenswing, who ordered a full investigation into the bleeding. The mines at the top of the Fall were closed, and the small Steading of Long-Shadow was created this day as the mines were relocated to the bottom of the fall inside the long shadow of the cliffs.

There were still reports that there were still deposits of the Orichalcum in the water, and so Leri visited Rhonwen's Fall personally. She spent over a week at Rhonwen's Fall and investigated the mines and the routes personally. She claimed the moving of the mines to be an economic success and it was soon after this that she started her campaign for Empress.

Leri was a polarising figure in the Senate and it is said that it was her nomination for Empress that caused many of the other candidates to pull out and to place their support behind either Leri or Marika. Reports of the time tell of rumours that Leri cursed Marika to scare her from standing for Empress, some say that Marika was cursed to age where as there are other stories that she had nightmares that caused her restless sleep. There are other reports that the curses were placed by Tekupala ton Mariika to remove the support of Leri from the senate. The curses definitely did not help Leri's campaign, and she returned to her steading after this and destroyed all records of her time as senator. There are no records of Leri returning to Anvil or political life.

The last time the Fall bled was during the reign of Empress Deanne. As a native of Miaren, Deanne arrived to Rhonwen's Fall personally where she met

⁶ The casting of Quickening Cold meat was rarely cast before the fall of Britta due to the potential side effects of where the Spirits go after the ritual finishes. However, the Eastern Sky was known to have this ritual cast upon it twice during this time

with members of the Silent-Word coven and a young guide by the name of Dewi Shadowbirch.⁷ With the mines having moved to the bottom of the Fall it was believed that it was flooding of the old mine shafts that caused the bleeding of the waters.

There are once again no records of the meeting. Senate records show that when Empress Deanne was about her time there she commented on the hospitality of her hosts but laughed away the blood talking about the fact that sometimes things are mysteries for a reason. There are no other mentions of the meeting. Dewi never returned home and went on to become the host of the Navarr Egregore Spirit. It was said that he spent his remaining years walking the Trods and giving guidance to those who would listen.

⁷ Shadowbirch steading is based in Therunin in the Steading of Return.

Rhonwen's Fall

Rhonwen's Fall is home to several groups., some are Stridings based then and others are Steadings that use Rhonwen's Fall as a sheltering point over winter.

Fallshome Steading is the major steading that is still based in Rhonwen's Fall. They have skilled brokers and artisans and often trade the rich Orichalcum that is found in the area. Gerallt Fallshome was the Cardinal of Vigilance in the Reign of Empress Giselle and members of the Fallshome steading have been General of the Quiet Step three times in Imperial History. Fallshome Steading are welcoming for any Navarr who would need sanctuary, although they have set up waystations to trade away from the falls themselves.

Silent-Word who are a small striding that return to Rhonwen's Fall most Winters to rest, they claim to be the decedents of Rhonwen herself and have made sure that every time that the Fall has run red that they open up their halls to those who would come and witness. There are no records that they have ever been active in Anvil although there are records of their involvement in political matters where Rhonwen's Fall has been mentioned on in records. Fallshome Steading say that Silent-Word have their own rooms and accommodations in the Fall which only they can access – this includes a full banquet hall that is used when they invite guests to the Fall.

The small steading of long-shadow still exists at the bottom of the fall providing Orichalcum for the artisans in Fallshome. This steading was established by the Miaren Senator Leri Ravenswing⁸ when she relocated the mines at the top of the Fall to the foot of them. Although long-shadow is a small steading it has a proud heritage and refuses to be named as part of Fallshome itself.

The striding of Ivymoon, although based in Trejii, used to regularly walk the trods from Rhonwen's Fall to Trejii although the steading has not been heard of since the Gatekeeper of Loyalty, Adain Ivymoon, was slain at the fall of Trejii. The Ivymoon steading has had a renowned history⁹ since it was formed after the Death of Emperor James.

⁸ See above for details of Leri.

⁹ Deanne Ivymoon was one of the original founders of the Ivymoon striding.

The original findings have been edited, refined, and in some cases expanded by the Navarr scholar Brianna Redwind, following her Autumn 381YE return from an extended sabbatical in Axos alongside Ellian Sweetwater. It forms part of an ongoing effort initiated by the Department of Historical Research to review a number of recent documents they have presented.

Sanctuary Falls

The steading of Rhonwen's Fall was originally known as Sanctuary Falls. When Seren was overwhelmed, many of the refugees regrouped at Sanctuary Falls ahead of the vallorns initial expansion, and managed to prevent the location being overwhelmed. There is some evidence that many of the intricate designs located there predate the casting of the great ritual; some are believed to have been carved by a powerful magician (perhaps a proto-vate) by the name of Star who is anecdotally believed to have been a covenmate of Navarr herself. Indeed, one of the few stories that mention Star directly speak of her being one of those who led many of the refugees out of Seren to the comparative safety of Sanctuary. There are records that Star returned to Sanctuary Falls several times and it is even thought that she died there. No physical remains have ever been found, but it is unlikely that they would have been - even in the first years following the vallorn disaster the ability of the miasma to animate the recently dead must have been well known.



Sanctuary Falls itself was built into cliffs behind the waterfalls of the Gancio. It was in here that the Seren refugees hid for a time from the orcs who were still invading the territory. There is archaeological evidence that points to orcs bearing symbols associated with both the Jotun and the Thule being present in the land around this time, despite the relative distance from their respective nations. What ultimately happened to the refugees here is not clear; some argue that they were the ancestors of the Navarr who used the Falls as a steading

while others say that as the vallorn became stronger they were forced to retreat eastward into Astolat.

Today Rhonwen's Fall is home to several well-known groups. Fallshome is the major steading here, known for their skilled brokers and artisans. They trade the rich orichalcum from the mines that surround the lower falls. The Silent-Word are a small striding associated with the Falls that return here most Winters to rest; they claim to be the literal descendants of Rhonwen herself. Every time the Falls have run red they have offered hospitality to any who would come and witness. The small steading of Long-shadow still exists at the bottom of the fall providing orichalcum for the artisans in Fallshome. Finally, the striding of Ivymoon walked the trods from Rhonwen's Fall to Trej in Hercynia, although they are believed to have fallen alongside Adain Ivymoon, former Cardinal of Loyalty, who was slain by the hands of the Thule during the fall of Treji.

The Designs

Looking at the carvings on Sanctuary Falls there appear to be twelve key points that are marked upon the cliffs, joined by a complex pattern of spiral carvings. Of these twelve points there are eight that are marked more deeply, with more complicated carvings between them. Several theories suggest that these points relate to the Vallorn hearts, but these theories are widely disputed. The exact number of Vallorn has been a matter of debate for centuries, but it is considered unlikely that there are as many as a dozen.

Until very recently, modern Imperial scholarship cautiously accepted that there are only seven hearts - five in the Empire (in Miaren, Therunin, Hercynia, Liathaven and Brocéliande), one in Thule lands to the north (now confirmed as being in southern Sküld, and one in the Mallum, believed to be named Beantal Dól. Speculation places an eighth heart in a rumoured "sunken city" at the heart of the Bay of Catazar - Feion Essa - but there is actually little solid evidence to support this claim. Most of the stories of Feion Essa can be traced to a book written in the League sometime in the early days of the Empire. Recent information from Axos confirms the presence of an actual eighth vallorn in that eastern nation. Indeed a recent expedition by members of the Department of Historical Research has confirmed the existence of a massive vallorn surrounding the city of Cavan at the heart of Axos.

Scholars have tried to map the carvings onto a map of the Empire but they do not seem to map in anyway with the Trod network. In 176 YE the historian

Siriol Leafstalker claimed to be able to map the markings on Rhonwen's Fall to a map of the Empire. Working with a group of Urizen stargazers to predict changes in the influence of the Spring realm over time. Apparently they discovered that taking this slow shift over time into account, the designs mapped to the current positions of the trods to within a reasonable margin of error - although modern scholars are unable to replicate their research. Details on her theories were lost in the reign of Emperor Nicovar, she successfully predicted that other vallorn would be found in Otkodov, the Mallum and Axos, but also suggested four other markings relevant to the vallorn were located in Narkyst, the Lasambrian Hills, the Broken Shore, and the Vore.

No modern scholars have ever been able to reproduce these predictions and it is widely believed that the predictions must have been flawed. There is not the slightest sign of any vallorn in the Lasambrian Hills and a recently discovered letter from Emperor Guntherm to Reaghan Leafstalker, the historian's granddaughter, included a note that the King of Narkyst claimed that there was no trace of anything like the vallorn in their lands. As a result modern scholars cannot say with any confidence whether Siriol Leafstalker's correct predictions of the vallorn in the Otkodov and the Mallum were brilliant, or simply fortuitous.

Interestingly, there are no reliable accounts of Navarr herself visiting Sanctuary Falls. Those scholars who believe the designs there pre-date the great disaster find this unusual as some of them appear to match up to the trods that originate in Miaren and pass through the adjacent territories. Did these carvings have some connection to the original Dance of Navarr and Thorn? Or were the Terunael familiar in some way with the concept of trods? There are no obvious answers to these questions - only rampant speculation.

The Bleeding Falls

Records from the time when the Silent Word performed their ritual at Rhonwen's Fall say that during the working, the waterfall ran with blood. Cynics suggest that this perceived change in colour was another coincidence - impurities from the orichalcum mines upstream could easily have been responsible for giving the water a reddish taint. There are reports of this orichalcum staining effecting being severe enough to cause concern three times during the history of the Empire.

The first occurrence was during the reign of Empress Aenea. A group of skilled mages sent by the Imperial Conclave including the Spring Archmage, Badden Eternal, and the Winter Archmage, Enchanter Blaihot of House Bascombe. The two were close friends, and spent some time investigating the fall; yet when summoned by the Conclave to give their report, they refused to speak of what had happened there. Declarations of Sorcery were brought against them (although both failed to be upheld by the Conclave), and both resigned their positions shortly after. Badden went on to raise a wayhouse in Miaren where he settled down and tended to the needs of any who were passing. Enchanter Blaihot returned to Dawn and removed himself from public life. His daughter Ofelia became the highly successful general of the Eastern Sky; it is widely believed that talk of "a host of undying spirits" that fought alongside the Dawnish soldiers was reference to a ritual enchantment provided by her father's coven.

The second time that there were reports of the bleeding falls was in the period between the reigns of Emperor Nicovar and Empress Mariika. The senator for Miaren at this time was a merrow by the name of Leri Ravenswing, who ordered a full investigation into the previous bleeding incident. The mines at the top of the Fall were temporarily closed, and the small steading of Long-Shadow was created this day as the mine workings were relocated to the bottom of the Fall inside the long shadow of the cliffs. Since there were still deposits of orichalcum in the water, Leri visited Rhonwen's Fall personally. It was after this visit that she started her campaign for Empress. Some historians argue that it was Leri's nomination and the subsequent political manoeuvring that lead ultimately to the election of Empress Mariika. Stories suggest that Leri laid some sort of curse on Marika - or threatened to do so - in an attempt to scare her out of standing for Empress, but that she miscalculated and backlash against her unsubtle behaviour cost her any chance of gaining the Throne.

The last time the Fall bled was during the reign of Empress Deanne. As a native of Miaren, Deanne responded to the reports with a personal visit to Rhonwen's Fall, where she met with members of the Silent-Word coven and a young guide by the name of Dewi Shadowbirch. There are once again no records of what was discussed during the meeting and when asked Deanne commented only on the hospitality of her hosts, laughing off the matter of the red waters with an off-hand comment that sometimes things are mysteries for a reason. Dewi went on to become the host of the Navarr egregore spirit, best known for his enthusiasm for walking the trods guiding as many Navarr as he could.

Past Life Vision of Empress Lisabetta

Winter Solstice, 380YE

Lisabetta Giacomi von Holberg (the League)
Accompanied by Livia of Celestial Cascade (Urizen)

Lisabetta was selected as a visionary by the Throne.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary and guide together.

The visionary awoke standing in front of a mirror, being girded by someone who called them “sister”. The room they were in was small, with the mirror taking up most of one of the narrower walls. Underneath the mirror was a table, with three candles on it to the visionary's left. On the other side of the room there was another table, with a bowl of fruit, a small pile of potions or herbs, and a wand with a greenish end. There was also a set of greaves on it.

The visionary’s reflection was of a woman of five and a half feet or less, with red hair, and blue scales on her forehead, wearing some sort of black or dark grey surcoat or gambeson, with red and gold tabbed edges at the bottom. The sister was wearing a pale dress and a black hat with a jewel in front, with an orange veil at the back of the hat.

The sister said that Bedevere was waiting, and that he would do whatever the visionary asked. She asked the visionary to hold still and strapped on a breastplate and greaves, asking the visionary to hold the front of the breastplate while she strapped on the back.

While she did this, the sister asked, “Have you come to a decision?” The visionary asked if there was anything they had forgotten, and the sister said she would start from the beginning.

They were in Miaren, waiting to attack Seren in order to deal with the Vallorn. The armies there along with theirs were from the Marches, Highguard, and the League, the last led by Giovanni, who the sister called “the King of Dawn” in a somewhat mocking tone. The visionary had to decide whether they were to attack with the other armies, or hang back and go in when the other armies were exhausted.

Once the visionary had been fully girded in armour, the sister asked if it was comfortable, and the visionary said it was. The sister described it as looking fit for the earl of the house.

There was then a voice from the visionary's right, from behind a curtain, which the visionary assumed was Bedevere as mentioned earlier. They asked what the visionary's orders were for the Golden Sun.

The visionary said that they would fight with the Empire, and were not going to hang back, adding that with the death of the Empress, the Empire was a fragile thing.

Bedevere said that they couldn't transmit those orders to the army, asking how, by the virtue of Pride, could they fight alongside the Marchers? The visionary asked "Is Dawn part of the Empire?" Bedevere paused and quietly answered, "Yes. Yes." The visionary asked again, saying that Bedevere needed to answer more clearly, and Bedevere said "Yes!".

Then Bedevere asked why would they not, by the virtue of Ambition, go in and take the treasures of Seren for themselves, given that otherwise they would be divided among the armies. Finally, he asked, "What about the highest virtue, the virtue of Glory? People will sing of this hereafter."

There was some more discussion, and then the visionary said, "These are my orders. You will obey." Bedevere paused, then said, "As my earl commands!". The vision faded.

Lisabetta's soul was examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, her soul was clear of any marks. After the vision, her soul showed a shade of armour around her, that looked like it would fade by the time she next slept.

Livia's soul was also examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Both before and after the vision, her soul had a dedication to Wisdom with the strength of seven priests, and a testimony of "Teacher" with the strength of seven priests.

The coven of the Spire of Auric Horizon also performed divination rituals on Lisabetta after the vision to gain information about her past life and corroborate the vision.

The Day divination ritual indicated that the vision happened 300 to 400 years ago, and showed a merrow woman seeing Lisabetta as she is now, reflected in a mirror. She builds a delicate machine part with a crystal in it. Earl Nimue de Gavim (possibly "de Gauvain") contemplates it.

The Night divination ritual showed a merrow standing on a hill overlooking a forest, with war raging below. If she leads with a shield, she will be stuck behind allowing others to take what is rightfully hers. If she leads with the sword instead, she will betray those who rely on her shield for protection. There is a golden glow in the centre of the forest for the one who first gets there, with a name that sounds like Seren.

ABRAXUS STONES

Published Research:

During Autumn 382YE, the Advisor on the Vallorn Sian Eternal commissioned research into the Abraxus stones with a focus on the item's origins and uses of significant stones. The researcher - Luca Friedlin von Holberg - was unable to establish anything new about the origins of the stones apart from to confirm that they were most likely first used by the Terunael. Their primary use was apparently as a gift to foreign delegates. Whilst they were being hosted in one of the cities of the Terun, the amulet's properties served as a symbolic demonstration of the city's intent to protect their guests.

Luca was able to discover information about several historical examples of the Abraxus Stone.

Gambit of the Wulfhunter

The *Gambit of the Wulfhunter* belonged to the warden, Mischa Koschinov Sennariv. In 112YE, according to the stories, Mischa spent a significant period hunting a certain powerful elder plaguwulf that had been attacking vales across Dupadealuri and Srodkoja. The stories claim that in addition to the plaguwulf itself possessing pestilential breath, the husks it created spread that same pestilence in some fashion leading to veritable plague of shambling horrors in southern Miekarova. The warden hounded the creature relentlessly until it had led them back to its hidden lair. Upon arriving at the creature's den Mischa spent several hours killing each husk that came at them, ensuring that when the time came the plaguwulf would have no reinforcements to call upon. This done Mischa then invited their quarry out into the open. Trapped with nowhere else to go, the beast emerged. The tale ends with the plaguwulf breathing out its pestilent breath on the warden who, with a smirk, drank a simple healing potion - of which the warden had several at their belt - and charged the monster.

Mischa was victorious, and ascribed their success to the possession of a powerful treasure recovered from a barrow somewhere in northern Krevsaty. The stone was apparently passed down from warden to warden, but its current whereabouts are unknown.

Halsnoer des Omstregelend Vergif

This stone apparently originates in the Sarcophan Delves. Called the *Halsnoer des Omstregelend Vergif*, it apparently has much the same design as one would expect from an Imperial Abraxus Stone. It takes the form of a bracelet of a silver metal which has been studded throughout with pale opals and engraved with the owner's family name. According to the researcher, the amulet may have used different components to those involved in making an Imperial Abraxus Stone. The Sarcophan merchant who was attempting to sell the item was allegedly very closed-lipped about the exact provenance of the item; it is not clear if its existence is an example of two separate nations inventing the same magic amulet or if the artisans of the Delves derived the schema for their own stones from the Empire in some fashion.



The Vate's Shelter

The *Vate's Shelter* was worn by the Navarri vate *Roswen Doublestep* during a purge of the vallorn that took place in Liathaven in the reign of Empress Brannan. It is said to be a fine silver band that shone brightly under moonlight, allowing Roswen to be seen easily by her allies during her many night time skirmishes. The stone was apparently handed down from vate to vate since the first days after the destruction of Terunael - although it is not clear if the amulet was an actual artefact or simply a treasured relic that was repeatedly reforged.

Being the leader of a potent coven, Roswen would often volunteer to bear the enchantment of *Fetid Breath* of *Teeming Plague* despite its unfortunate potential side effects. During engagements with vallornspawn, Roswen would apparently rush into the miasma with a dozen doses of the mageblood philtre. Through her use of the talisman she was able to get deep into the miasma, behind a large portion of vallornspawn husks, before unleashing the torrent of *Spring magic*. Roswen and her coven were unfortunately lost during the Summer 225YE, and her body was never recovered. At least, as the bearer of an Abraxus Stone, it is unlikely Roswen will have been transformed into a vallornspawn husk - although the same sadly cannot be said for her coven.

The Swan's Chalice

The *Swan's Chalice* belonged to an Urizen Sentinel, *Nikettas of the Spire of the Green Shallows*, who served briefly in the *Citadel Guard* during the reign of Emperor Hugh. Nikettas fought against the Druj for almost his entire adult life. The Swan's Chalice was apparently a gift from the eternal Ylenrith, allegedly earned at least in part by Nikettas' involvement in the rescue of the Archmage of Day, *Gemma Steward*. Nikettas fell in battle in Holberg in 365YE and the talisman was never recovered. According to reasonably reliable reports, the amulet was "renewed" in some fashion each Spring by a herald of Ylenrith who sought out Nikettas at Anvil. It is not clear if the herald is *still* renewing the talisman, wherever it may have ended up.

Abraxus, the mad "prophet"

The research explored a potential connection between the magical jewellery and the "prophet" Abraxus Whitespire, but came to the conclusion that the controversial merrow almost certainly took the name Abraxus from the talisman - valuable as it would prove to be to those experimenting with potentially poisonous combinations of herbs and philtres - rather than having any profound connection to the Terunael artisans with whom the stone originated. Luca theorises that the records of a *Xavier Whitespire* who submitted multiple statements of principle which are in keeping with the future teachings of Abraxus may actually prove to be the original Abraxus. There are no records of judgements from Xavier later than 45YE, and the first known publication of Abraxus was the infamous *On the Teleology of Pure Liao* in 47YE.

Excerpts from Luca von Holberg's initial letter detailing his research:

"First let me say thank you for the opportunity to study one of, in my opinion, the most interesting items that artisans are able to produce. The common use of Cavul and its obvious history with the peoples of Navarr and Highguard paint a fascinating picture of pre-Imperial life.

Origin of the Abraxus Stones

I was unable to gather much more on the origins of the Abraxus Stone, aside from what is relatively common knowledge. The records of ritual responses I

was able to gain access to, from the reign of Empress Deanne, date the creation back to the period of Terunael – at least in the area of the Bay of Catazar.

Their primary use seems to have been as a gift to foreign delegates, whilst they were being hosted in one of the cities of Terun, as a demonstration of the city's intent to protect, the amulet being an active defence against poison.

Obviously, with the fall of Terunael, these objects once associated with visiting dignitaries became a vital tool in the fight against the vallorn.”

“Ylenrith and Cavul.

The theoretical link between the Abraxus Stone, the eternal Ylenrith and the rune Cavul is an interesting one. The runbe is often used as a mark on the talisman seeing most use, as you would expect, in Wintermark. Cavul being so closely linked to the Swan it, of course, makes perfect sense for people to link the three together. I have in the past observed magicians, who practice the goetic tradition, calling on Ylenrith's link to the Stone to purify venom within the target.”



Further Research

I expect that you will have some thoughts on what direction to take future research. I believe that the more traditional scholarly approach would not turn up more than what I have already managed to uncover. I have some ideas on potential future avenues of research.

- The material components used in the creation of the Sarcophan variant. I would suggest the Ambassador to the Sarcophan Delves could try to negotiate for that information.
- Regarding the Swan's Chalice. I would suggest a discussion with Ylenrith could open up some possibilities, but it should be noted that the magic on the talisman was not permanent in nature.
- The Vate's Shelter was lost where it fell in Liath's Heart, Liathaven. A statement of principle in the Navarr national assembly, passing with greater majority, could result in someone coming forward with more information.

I hope what I have been able to uncover is of some use to you, Advisor on the Vallorn. I honestly think that, due to the nature in trying to protect ourselves,

this might have been one of the first talismans to be ‘developed’, or at least seen widespread use”

On Luca Fredlin von Holberg’s advice the following Statement was passed through the Navarr national assembly at the Autumn Equinox summit of 383YE:

Judgement 56

After a historical research request we the Navarr National Assembly as a matter of national Pride ask for citizens who have information regarding the Abraxus Stone known as "The Vate's Shelter". This was worn by a vate known as Roswen Doublestep and was lost during the reign of Brannan.

Raised by Ranulf Farkas and upheld with a Greater Majority (180 - 0)

In response to this call the heroes of Anvil received word in Winter 383YE from the Marshstalkers Steading of Northpines. The Marshstalkers had knowledge to share on The Vate’s Shelter but requested aid before divulging this information. An attack had been made on their wayhouse by the Fello-rich Striding, known agents of the Heirs of Terunael and an heirloom was stolen. Known as the Promise of Home it is an Icon of the Witness that was hallowed with True Liao during the reign of Empress Teleri.

At the Winter Solstice a team of Navarri travelled through the Sentinel Gate to Northpines in the hopes of recovering the Promise of Home. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful in locating the heirloom. I hope that with vigilance we will be able to track down the Fello-rich Striding again to reclaim the icon and that we will be able to secure some information on the Vate’s Shelter so that both of these items of significance are back in the hands of virtuous Navarri citizens.

SINGING STONES

Letter received by Sian Eternal as the initial research on 'Charter Stones'

Sian of the Eternal Family

I'm sorry to say that I've not been able to find anything of great use to you on this subject. I've included what I can – and a few speculations as well. I hope this is sufficient.

Looking through the remains of the archives of the destruction of the vallorn in Miaren there are very few actual records remaining. Most of the information on what was found has been either lost or destroyed either by time or the fires of Nicovar.

However, I am certain that there is no mention of Charter Stones – in fact, I'm not sure that such a thing exists or is a thing I can find no mention to Charter Stones in any Terunael or Navarri record. Although I guess it could be a colloquial word for something else.

So not to waste your time, I have looked at details for other stones around that period of time.

Something seems to be watching me through the window. The Civil Service has provided guards to protect me from the Whisper Gallery... but they hamper my work. I shall try to do as much as I can.

The Singing Stones

There are records that there were one or two odd stones found. These were about 4-5 foot tall and had patterns carved through them, not as curved as the patterns of the Navarr but more angular like many of the Terunael artifacts. They seem to sing softly in a lyrical way if you listen closely which is quite disconcerting but it means they have been commented on.

The stones have four angled columns joined at the bottom and I would summarise that a bowl would be placed on the top of the stones for blood to be collected and then run down. Probably a bowl of bronze with holes to allow the blood to flow.

What happened to these stones since, I don't know. One was sold at a Bourse auction, but it seemed to have no properties that would be of use, the records say that it allowed two rituals long lost to Imperial Lore. It was bought by the

Keeper of the Thimble at the time, but after the destruction of his Striding in Liathaven no mention since has been had.

Sometimes you are so angry, you can't be upset. Escon, my ginger tom has been found dead. I named him after the Egregore himself. When I say found dead, something has nailed him to a tree and cut out his tongue. I hope that this research is worth it, I don't get paid enough for this. I know that the guards will help keep me safe, but I can't help but be scared.

The Dolmen

The other stone of note found at this time was a Dolmen. It seems curious to have a Dolmen in the heart of the Forest, since most of the Dolmens we have found have been in the Marches, seemingly linked heavily to their hearth magics.

I am honestly unsure what happened to it. It seemed pretty out of place in ruins of the college and military academies. I think records have proposals to knock it down and build the steadings. There are records about having it moved to the Marches, but the results are inconclusive.

It seems unlikely that this was related to the Terunael, it was very different stylistically and didn't have any of the carvings. There are records about it having latent magical properties, but cross referencing, it seems many of the older Dolmens around the Empire have these properties but the use of the detect magic spell on them doesn't seem to reveal a lot.

Black Stones

Possibly related are the stories of "black stones" in Varushka. There are a number of these scattered across Varushka. They tend to be associated with the various dark powers of the forest. To be honest with you, I find the very few stories of these things deeply unsettling and would rather not look any closer. They tend to involve anointing things with blood and serving as markers for grim oaths. Deeply unsettling, and trailing the dangerous edges of the worst parts of dark blood magic.

I hope that this is of some use to you and that you are able to make some sense of it. If I can, I'll see if I can uncover anything else and if it is in any way coherent I'll either forward it to you or

Right, a Winter coven has cast “there is no welcome here” around my house. I am not leaving Necropolis though. I will make sure that an Autumn Magister casts Winged Messenger so you can receive this and I’m not leaving my house

Samael

Further Information on Singing Stones

Of particular interest to many blood magicians are the so-called *Singing Stones* of ancient Terunael. Extremely rare, these relics are especially sought after by Navarr magicians for obvious reasons. Only a handful have been uncovered, and the process of creating the is little understood. Each seems to be unique; no two are precisely the same. There are some similarities between those that have been uncovered so far. Each stone takes the form of four angle columns joined at the base. They tend to be between four and five feet tall, made of stone, and carved on all sides with angular patterns somewhat reminiscent of the labyrinth marks common on the skin of many cambion. These angular designs are common to many artifacts of Terunael - and somewhat at odds with the curved, sweeping patterns associated with the Navarr. The arrangement of columns allows a carefully constructed bowl to be placed atop the singing stone in such a way that the contents will slowly run down the carved designs along each column. The obvious intent is that a bowl of blood with four precisely places holes would bathe then entire stone over the course of a ritual performance.

What sets the singing stones apart from other Terunael structures, however, in that they appear to sing. Each stone encountered so far has its own, barely audible, distinct song. The music becomes a little clearer when one is physically touching the object, or when it is bathed in blood as part of a blood magic ritual. Each song is difficult to describe, but often leaves listeners reporting sensations of disorientation or unease.

The stones encountered by Imperial archaeologists to date have shared a similar property; they allow multiple covens from the same nation to cooperate on the performance of a specific ritual in a manner



similar to a Web of Celestial Attunement, or the archmage's Belt of Stars. Unfortunately for modern magicians, most of the stones uncovered so far have been intended for rituals unknown to Imperial lore. Although their effects can be surmised, the stones appear so precisely made that they require exact formulaic rituals to be of any use.

A larger variant of the singing stones has been encountered by explorers in Terunael ruins are immobile. Unlike their shorter counterparts, attempts to relocate them invariably end up destroying their magic. Most of those encountered were already inert, damaged beyond repair by the passage of time and the vallorn. Ifan Redwater, who made a study of one of these obelisks uncovered in the ruins of Seren theorised that the larger stones are intended to work in some fashion with the local flows of mana, not entirely dissimilar to the standing stones that dot the Marches. The obelisk in the ruins of Seren had the property of allowing multiple covens to co-operate on a ritual of Autumn magic intended to ensure a good harvest for the farmers of the territory, with a ritual similar to Gathering the Harvest. Whatever the precise details of the ritual, it proved impossible to use the stone in conjunction with Gathering the Harvest. According to further research, another three obelisks of similar size once stood in the same location, but long years and the destructive nature of the vallorn had shattered them. Ifan Redwater tentatively speculates that they were intended for use with three other rituals similar in nature to Blessing of New Spring, Strong Ox, Golden Sun, and Fallow Fields and Dried Meat.

Past Life Vision of Jericho of the Suns of Couros as documented in Echoes of the Labyrinth.

Summer Solstice, 380 YE

Jericho of the Suns of Couros (Highguard)

Accompanied by Samuel of the Cohort of the Winter Bear (Highguard)

Jericho was selected as a visionary by the winner of the Virtuous Auction at the Spring 380 YE summit.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary with some assistance from his guide.

The visionary came to in a dark, gloomy forest with a little light. There was what looked like a wall of creepers, vines and thorns crossing the area of the forest they were in, and on the other side of the wall was a man dressed like someone from Navarr. He gave his name as Prys and addressed the visionary as Envis or Envallis, his wife, who was a Thorn and also six months pregnant. He also mentioned that they were of the Firstdance striding, and one of them said that the paths had changed.

They had apparently come into the forest, which was in the heart of the Vallorn, to find a stone obelisk that was there - it looked like four small towers joined at the base, made of a whitish stone, covered in runes and designs and what appeared to be blood (the visionary touched it and some of it came away on their hand).

Prys cast Detect Magic on the stone obelisk, and said that it contained several new rituals, including one called Hold The Line, and another with a name that started with Dark or Black. As they examined the obelisk, the visionary heard noises around them in the forest. The visionary said that as a Thorn, they would defend against whatever was out in the forest, and fight so that Prys could fall back and bring news of the stone to their people. Prys asked, "What about the baby?", and the visionary said that the baby would come again, they would come again and see each other again.

The vision ended shortly after this conversation, but before it did, the visionary heard a woman's voice saying, "I wanted to give you these before you go, because I'm not going to see you again."

Jericho and Samuel had their souls examined by the rite of Insight before and after the vision.

Before the vision, Jericho's soul had a testimony of "Exemplary Discipline" with the strength of a single priest behind it. After the vision, as well as the testimony, his soul appeared to be injured. It appeared to be twisted around itself, causing him to be confused about the passage of time and believe that it was up to a year later than it was, and there was also a corrosive miasma across it that made him suspicious about discussing the vision or having the rite of Insight performed on him.

Two exorcisms with the strength of seven priests behind them were needed to treat these two wounds; the corrosive miasma was cleared first (with a weapon to hand in case he attempted to attack as Allegra Shatterspire had done when affected by a similar spiritual injury), and then the second exorcism shocked his soul back into place and restored his sense of the passage of time.

Samuel's soul before the vision had a dedication to Loyalty with the strength of a single priest. After the vision, as well as his dedication, his soul was thin and tense, causing him a sense of loss and a desire to be back in the Labyrinth as if he had left part of himself in there. An exorcism with the strength of seven priests shocked and settled his soul back into place.

Jericho also recognised the woman's voice right at the end of his vision as that of Merryn Ruis Farkas, the late general of the Navarr army of the Quiet Step, and the words as the last thing she said to him before she died.

The coven of the Spire of Auric Horizon also performed divination rituals on Jericho after the vision to gain information about his past life and corroborate what the vision indicated.

The Day divination ritual indicated that his past life was a Navarr woman, Enthis Firstdance, who was a Thorn and was six months pregnant at the time, and that the vision took place around 350 years ago. She also had scratches all over her legs and arms, as if she'd been in a fight with a hedge.

The Night divination ritual gave impressions of a stone, an argument between Enthis and another about who'd protect the stone and who would fight off the enemies, and growls and beasts surrounding the two of them. It also indicated that the vision took place during a great period of change for Merryn.

For more information about these rituals, please ask Auric Horizon.

The appearance of Merryn, someone of significance to Jericho's current life rather than his past self - both in the vision and in the divinatory rituals performed afterwards - is not something that has been observed in any other visions since Winter 376 YE, and so more information will be needed to determine what this might mean.



Advisor's Notes: Other Significant History

It is through the documents in this section and those from previous sections that we can start to paint a picture of the Navarri nation from its conception to its recent history.

Most noteworthy is the ability to start to narrow down a timeline in regards to the destruction of the Vallorn in Miaren. The past life vision of Lisabetta Giacomi von Holberg gives us insight into the final push against the heart of Seren. The strike was made during the reign of Giovanni, also known as the Peacemaker. This puts it at somewhere between 23 and 34YE.

Documents suggest that fifteen years prior to this Rhonwen laid the groundwork for the assault with her coven casting Wither the Seed upon the territory.

This section also provides avenues for future research into tools to help in battles against the Vallorn. From potential variants of the artisan items we use if we were to consult foreign nations to further investigation of sites from around the time of the fall, like Rhonwen's Fall.

RECENT HISTORY AND PRESENT SITUATION



In this final section of research documents the focus is on more recent developments, opportunities and ongoing situations. Included are the following:

Thoughts on Consciousness by Arawyn Blackwater. While this document, found at the steading of Return is purely theoretical it serves as evidence of early theories into Vallorn husks and how they differ to other instances of animated bodies.

Notes on the Vallorn by Emhyr Shadowbirch. This document was somewhat rambling in nature but held some interesting queries and excerpts of note are included here.

Vallorn Husks and the Soul. A summary of the investigations into the spiritual threat that the Vallorn poses.

Historical Research into Durstan of the Briar, the legendary, if controversial, figure uncovered in research into the Vallorn itself. While he is a historical individual further research indicates a possible tie to the Heirs of Terunael, several of whom have taken on his name of variants thereof.

The Silent Bell investigation into the Heirs of Terunael, a group of radical individuals seeking to spread the Vallorn. Aided by the eternal Yaw'nagrah this group and those like it from a very real and present threat to the Empire.

A Virtuous War, recent Synod judgements relating to the Vallorn, especially those regarding the formation of the Grey Pilgrims.

Pilgrimages of The Great Choreography. Proposed pilgrimage routes following in the steps of Navarr and Thorn along the trods.

The Vallorn by Talek Dancewalker. Whilst it does not contain up to date information this pamphlet from Spring 379YE provides a strong overview of what the Vallorn is.

Medical Observations on the Vallorn by Dr. Cadfael Eternal. A guide on treating injuries and other afflictions associated with flighting the Vallorn.

383YE Almanac. An excerpt of an almanac that gives reports on the recent war against the Vallorn and the formation of the Grey Pilgrims.

My own account of the opportunity in Liathaven and pushing back the Vallorn in Westwood. This summarises events around a once in a lifetime chance and the choices made around it.

Notes on outstanding and future avenues of investigation.

A closing Advisor's Notes and a couple of pages for you to add your own thoughts or any addendums that come to light.

THOUGHTS ON CONSCIOUSNESS BY ARAWYN BLACKWATER

It is obvious to me that all mortals have. Mortal beings have two parts to their consciousness, their Spirit and their Soul. Your soul is immortal, and is the part of you that travels through the labyrinth (or maybe crosses the great abyss in the case of the Imperial Orcs). Your spirit is the part of your personality that grows from the accumulation of memories of a living being. The constant accumulation of memories weighs the body down.

As people age their minds become infirm - this is because your spirit has only a certain limit it can achieve. You can only accumulate so many memories before the weight of them simply overwhelms your spirit and crushes it. This is why we forget - more and more as we get older. This helps to protect us against the effects, but it is a dam holding back a tide.

But it is not just the mind, the body is similarly affected. Experiences weigh the body down, changing it, wearing it out as it ages. This is most obvious with grievous injuries - it can be part of someone's nature (or spirit if you prefer) can be to be a fast sprinter - but that is lost if you chop their leg off. Eventually the weight of accumulated physical experience simply degrades the inherent nature of the body until it fails completely and dies.

Some mortal creatures, like the Volodny and the Thule dragons have used magic to make themselves undying. The Thule use powerful magic to keep their bodies alive - but only just. They are nothing but near motionless husks. The Volodny use different methods, creating new bodies to inhabit each time the old one perishes. Both class of beings however have an essential problem with memories - they simply cannot accumulate more memories.

As a result, both are forced to dispose of unwanted memories. There are stories about them not being able to remember inconsequential details but instead to keep the important things protected. I assume the same happens with heralds and other creatures of the realms. As undying creatures, eternalists must surely suffer the same problems that mortal beings do - they can only accumulate so many memories.

I assume that this is why items such as Kaela's book of the dead occurs or maybe even Phaleron's library.. I would have thought that although this is important in the powerful realms, in realms such as Summer key events are repeated with ceremony so they are constantly reminded, and I doubt in the chaos of Spring any of those creatures even care.

However, it is important to note that creatures of the realms do not have a soul. We believe that even when someone becomes a creature such as a herald, that their spirit stays to inform and empower the herald, keeping the memories and personality, but their soul goes to the labyrinth. It is important to note that in this case then it is the soul that is changes by experience. People do change and their nature changes, so that must be due to their soul. This would make sense because although liou can change someone's nature temporarily you cannot do it with magic, for the soul is protected in a way the spirit is not.

So your personality is part of your soul, not part of your spirit which is a reflection and storage of memories. This explains how rituals like Whispers through the Black Gate work. When someone dies what remains, for a brief time, is their spirit. The accumulation of memories and the resulting views and attitudes that that created. Magic can contact this memory, for a period of time. If there was terrible emotional trauma it can also cause a ghost to remain. When there is violent trauma, it can be so overwhelming that it breaks apart the essential link between the spirit and the soul. Basically, the person's personality falls to pieces, they die, but their spirit (their memories and personality) remains, burned into the world, as a ghost.

The question is, what replaces the soul in a herald. I guess part of the realm. They lose their nature, their soul and instead become filled with the nature of the realm - for a summer mage would become summery if they were to become a herald, but with their spirit shaping that due to sharing the memories that they had in life. The argument here is that is that people do not tend to radically change when they become heralds, merely changing slightly. I would argue that this is because to be chosen to become a herald you must be predisposed in that way already. I have never heard of a loud opinionated briar thorn suddenly being made a herald of the realm of day. Now it could be that that is not what the eternal is looking for or it might be that they are not suitable and their spirit would not fit with the part of the realm that has replaced their soul.

True Liou is an interesting point here, this must allow you to access a previous spirit of your soul. Your soul has touched many spirits and memories and the true liou allows it to tap into that spirit. If your soul is what affects your personality and actions, then this is unusual. I said previously that magic cannot affect it yet there are rituals that will affect it, such as the Chamber of Delights. This does not affect your core personality though, you still feel guilt and act in the basic way but with less inhibitions. Inhibitions are not part of your personality. It is like being drunk on nettle wine, it has not changed who you are, merely influenced you in a slight way.

Finally you get husks of the Winter Realm, such as those summoned by the Winter Ritual. This takes bodies and replaces their soul with parts of the winter realm, allowing access to some of their memories but making them be the mindless servants fueled by emptiness and hunger. This is very different to the husks of the Vallorn which are plants and moss that are within a terminal corpse, keeping it alive and stopping it from dying - so in this case they have both their spirit and their soul.

Which is more evil, it is obvious. A winter husk the soul has already passed on and it is the flesh and access to the spirit that is being used as a tool. The lack of strength of the spirit is because it is getting gradually weaker since is not compatible with the winter realm. A Vallorn husk traps the person in a state between life and death, keeping them alive but controlling their body. It is possible sometimes to talk to them although normally the Vallorn spores will not allow it or the person is in too much pain to be comprehensible in any way. These are at least my ponderings, I do not know how I would go about proving any of these thoughts

Addendum by Sian Eternal:

The above document was found at the steading of Return. While it is formed mostly of theorising it has since been confirmed that vallornspawn hold the souls of those it has taken.

At Return Ceinwen Eternal was gifted a magical item by the eternal Meraud that allowed her to use the Speak With Dead spell upon the husks there. It allowed her to call forth the person trapped within, they were not only aware of their lives before but also had an awareness and regret for their actions after becoming vallornspawn.

After this discovery through the bravery of a group of Navarr a vallornspawn was contained and Raewyn Eternal was protected whilst she performed the Rite of Insight upon it, seeing the soul trapped within.

EXCERPTS FROM NOTES ON THE VALLORN

Written by Emhyr Shadowbirch, Summer 780YE

The Heart of the Vallorn in Therunin is based in Greenheart, the history of the Vallorn in this area is a long one. With all the crazy shit in the world at the moment, it is probably wise if I write it down for prosperity. The stories that I was told as a child tell that the Vallorn claimed over half of Therunin or Tharunind as it used to be called.

The Vallorn spread south taking over Sweetglades, Eastring and even East Ashes to the coast of Feverwater. One of the big questions is how the Vallorn was fought back and why our predecessors didn't write it down. I know it is easy to blame the patrons of the realm of Night. The Rainbow Serpent or the Courtiers, but this is our reason to be. We swore an oath to do this, all of us. Why the fuck would an entire nation forget how to do something we have done before and is the reason we exist.

Nikovarr burnt down the libraries it is said, but that would make no sense. That does not answer why everything is forgotten. The destruction of the Vallorn over two regions and the reclaiming of them is key.

I hope that this document will allow for my thoughts and theories to be written down and that all visitors to Return take the time to read it and heed my words.

I do not mean to speak out of turn of anyone or anything in this document but I am questioning currently held views. It is important that this is realised not as being unwise but as a sign of all of our Vigilance.

The Druj seem to use some sort of stone pillar with a ritual, this creates a barrier that weakens Vallorn creatures. These pillars are supposedly Terunael in nature which would lead us to believe that they were created by our people when they first fought the Vallorn. Again, why did we stop. The Vallorn in Miaren was destroyed completely and then we forgot how to do it. Does this make any fucking sense to anyone? This is why we need to write this down and even though it may put us at risk from the Courtiers there is nothing else we can do. If we could speak to The Foundation, I may be able to find out more, but I heard rumours that even the Deepest One will not speak about it.

The Druj

Ghulai named Greenmask claims to have records and artefacts from the Vallorn of Beantol Dol. It is here that he is said to have stone pillars and other artefacts that will allow him to fight the Vallorn. Maybe it is hubris of the Empire, maybe it is Wisdom, that they do not work with the Druj, but there is a deeper secret here that we all know.

The Vallorn Hearts

Seren has been wiped out, but if that is the case then a large Terunael city with all their secrets and relics should be there. Where is the information? Where are the fucking answers? Another secret that people are not being told, that doesn't add up. There must be a greater thing happening here. Not even the Toad King could make an entire city disappeared.

Creatures in the Vallorn

The Husks

The Husks seem to be some walking dead like the creatures that you get when you cast the ritual Quickening Cold Meat. Dead bodies with Winter Spirits in that can be as foes. They're not. They are living people. The Vallorn moss and plants creeps inside a dying person, keeping them alive and using their body as a lifeless husk. It is possible that they could be saved, but they are dying anyway. Killing them actually will mean that the Vallorn husk cannot move. These are our friends and family (or orc's friends and families I guess) they feel and see everything, they are in pain and we have to kill them. Some of them go on for years in the state of dying and pain and we cannot get into the forests to always execute your foe. Friends or foes. The Vallorn will take the dying but can not take the dead. It is a mercy for them.

The Husks themselves seem to be slow moving but this is not quite the case. They are without purpose until they sense food, something that is not part of the Vallorn. Then they will travel towards that person or creature and devour them. If they can taken down they will grow back, even limbs will grow back. The deeper into the Vallorn they are, the stronger and faster they are. They do have one weakness though. An envenomed wand or knife will destroy them with a single blow and they will not be able to get back up. This will also kill the unfortunate they have controlled.

Some of the Vallorn husks I have seen recently have purple growths on them. These growths are unusual and the creatures seem stronger, but I do not know if that is true. If I was to hazard a guess I would say that the ones with the growth have a more animalistic intelligence and will back off and move away from large groups. I have not seen or heard of these before and it is a worry but the Vallorn changes, there are always new creatures.

Dryads

Never let a briar go anywhere near a Vallorn. I am not a briar hater. They were born tainted with spring magic and its not their fault, but get them to leave the Navarr and go as far away from the Vallorn as possible. Otherwise you get dryads, and no-one wants fucking dryads. When a briar becomes a husk they grow naturally strong, sometimes they develop bark that gives them protection the same as ringmail armour, sometimes they grow to up to seven foot tall, and they have been known to be able to rip through hunting leathers with claws or talons.



They never stop growing and are large and aggressive.

Ents

Sometimes a dryad will be left for hundreds of years. The Dryads keep growing to the monstrous creatures known as Ents. It is thought that their bark is as strong as platemail, that they can knock people to the ground with a single blow and that they can destroy shields. They are so large that venomous blows seem to make them angry but do not drop them as instantly as with the lesser creatures. They are fucking nasty and they should be avoided unless you have a large group of heroes of the Empire with you, maybe some collected through a sentinel gate from Anvil would be able to deal with them, but Goreu told me once that not even Inga Tarn herself could destroy one.

Recent Changes to the Vallorn

The Vallorn is moving, there is no doubt of this in my mind. In fact it is moving into this Valley. This happened just before Autumn but the Miasma came first, spreading forward into the Valley and infecting all that people saw, then came the Ettercaps and the Umberhulks. Tunneling through the Vallorn and the ground to appear from nowhere. The bug creatures create these tunnels that seem to act like trods, filling those that go through them with a rush of Spring magic and moving them through quickly as walking through the trods. This means once an Umberhulk has burrowed through the land the Husks and Ettercaps can erupt from it.

Rangara's Cauldron was first. I do not like to assign sentience to the Vallorn but it definitely seemed drawn there. The plants grew from the Spores quicker than any that I've seen. The husks with the purple markings started appearing and then they got braver. I am not sure that courage is something I can apply to plants inhabiting the dying corpses of my friends, but that's what happened. They started attacking steadings. Stridings were ambushed (again sentience is implied) but they were taken unawares.

The Vallorn here has awoken and its gaining land once again, and we don't have a fucking clue how to stop it. Patience and walking the trods will not solve this, we have to send in our armies, to destroy it and be prepared to pay the sacrifice.

I will try to add more to this next season.

VALLORN HUSKS AND THE SOUL

Here we further discuss information obtained about the Vallorn and how it may interact and indeed imperil the soul.

THE HUSKS OF RETURN

Whilst the heroes of the Empire were fighting against the Vallorn at the Steading of Return in 380YE we were hard pressed to survive the onslaught of the husks that would gather and attack the Steading regularly once our presence was noted. It was at this time that a Herald of the Eternal Meraud approached the Steading asking to speak to Ceinwen to provide a boon. This boon was a statute of old appearance that had a magic to it. Ceinwen was told it would allow a mage to be able to cast the spell Speak with Dead on a Vallorn husk (ordinarily the spell would have no effect on vallornspawn).

After casting Day magic to determine that this was indeed the use of this strange item Ceinwen used it when next the husks attacked. The gathered heroes of the Empire kept a number of husks on the floor by repeatedly cutting them down whilst Ceinwen cast her magic. The first time this produced endless screaming until the husk was put down with venom. However, on other attempts with different husks a variety of responses were discovered. Some seemed to have flashes of memory of who they were and their time as a husk. At least one horrified soul said that they could remember it all.. all their time as a puppet of the Vallorn.

It seemed from these interviews that these were people who had no control of their actions but at times could recollect bits of their previous life. They were trapped against their will.

A DISCUSSION WITH KAELA – BLEDRI ETERNAL

I was fortunate enough to be given an audience with the Eternal Kaela the Lady of the Grim Host, Queen of Silence. This was in the Year 381YE. This audience was attended by a number of Navarr Vates including Sian Eternal and Griff Umbral Path along with some others I did not know. I was given leave to ask a question of Kaela. Due to interactions with the Vallorn and attempts to talk to Vallorn Husks the previous year at the Steading of Return I thought that the best question I could ask would be one directly tied to her concern of the ending of things. Kaela exemplifies weakness, despair, old-age, senility and desperation. She takes no joy in these things, but presents them as simple,

unquestionable facts. Everything fails. Everything dies. Everything falls apart. In the end, entropy wins. I therefore asked her “Do those that fall to the Vallorn reach their true end?” In response I was told that “They do not. They are trapped.”

This was a response I expected and whilst there was nothing to compel the Eternal to answer my question truthfully, I could not think of any good reason as to why they would not.

After discussion with some Guides we thought it best to try and test this when we could and therefore resolved when next we could to ask a Guide to try and use the ceremony of Insight on a Husk to see if they were undead or a creature of the Realms or if as might be possible a person who's soul was trapped.

ON INSIGHTING A HUSK

What follows is an account by Raewyn Eternal, Guide of Loyalty when questioned on her experience using the rite of Insight upon a vallornspawn husk.

“A large contingent of mostly Navarr went on a skirmish to Liathaven as the mission was to hold an area while a ritual was conducted. I went with the battle-ready members of my striding with the secondary mission to capture a vallornspawn husk and perform an Insight upon it. We had to await an opportunity to lure a couple of husks away from the main horde and drag it behind our fighters where it was subdued and I was able to perform an Insight upon it. The insight the ceremony afforded me told me that I was looking at an orc, not an ‘other’, not a creature of the realms, but an orc, who judging by the tattered remains of their clothing, was formally of the Jotun. No lives were lost in the secondary mission, and it was conducted with the knowledge and support of the skirmish leader. The husk I insighted was then put to rest by envenoming”

Raewyn was not the only priest present in her mission, she had the support of Brat Umbral Path.

“He offered to do the ceremony in my stead as a more experienced fighter” she recalled “but I had to see it for myself. He oversaw and assisted with corralling the husk and watched as I performed the ceremony”

When asked how the Insight made her feel she replied

“Incredibly sad, I did not want it to be true, but knowing that this person in front of me was being denied their chance to cross the Howling Abyss and that such a terrible fate had befallen thousands of others is both heartbreaking and a source of strength and determination to see them set free.”

FURTHER INSIGHTS

Following Raewyn’s Synod Judgement detailing her Insight and what it meant being presented to the Empire more investigation was conducted by priests across the Empire and beyond.

I feel it is important to note what the Ceremony of Insight does, through the power of this ceremony, a priest can perceive the aura that surrounds living people, and gather information about spiritual effects. If the aura around an individual is not concealed then the priest will learn if they are; human, orc, creature of the realms (including heralds), ghost or ‘other’

What Raewyn saw in her insight was an orc soul, just as you would when performing the ceremony upon a living orc. In further investigations different results have been found which has caused increased concern. In addition to the insight of ‘human’ or ‘orc’ being documented some priests have seen the spiritual aura known as ‘other’.

One notable example of this was a former Imperial citizen who joined the Sumaah Republic who travelled to Anvil to learn more of the greatest spiritual threat to the Empire. After some discussion he travelled through the Sentinel Gate on a skirmish with the people of Navarr and was able to use the Ceremony of Insight upon a vallornspawn husk. He was distressed by what he saw, given that it wasn’t human, orc, ghost or of the realms. As Raewyn recalled following the skirmish debrief:

“They were shocked and alarmed by what they saw in the insight. They did this in an area known to have suffered the interference of Yaw’nagrah who has been actively changing vallornspawn from their usual forms. It is greatly hoped



that if this the case and her interference has changed the nature of those husks that the process has released the soul and allowed it to pass on unharmed”

Further investigation and discussion is required on this matter but what is known is that souls can be seen within husks and that the insight of ‘other’ is one that we hope is a sign that a soul has been released and that it is not a sign of corruption to the soul within the husk.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH REQUEST INTO THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DRUSTAN OF THE BRIAR

First, I gather the information already provided by the Historical Research Department, on the subject of the much admired and then despised figure. It is not inconsequential.

Known facts

- ❖ Born Holtford Miaren 234YE
- ❖ Noted in records as having taken part in numerous battles against the Vallorn in the run up to 268YE
- ❖ Made speeches against the Navarr leaders in the aftermath of Broceliande 268YE claiming that they were trying to play the Vallorn at their own game
- ❖ Gave one last speech in 272YE in Liathaven claiming that the Dance of Navarr and Thorn is designed to spread the Vallorn's strength across the Empire via the Trods and berating the gathered mages for not reading the text of the ritual and understanding its meaning.
- ❖ Disappears around 278YE after a last conversation with Dawnish Troubadour Arrayne, claiming a major breakthrough

Next, I turn to the key areas of speculation about Drustan of the Briar and explore whether there are any records that shed light on how such rumours are held in story and song arose, or even state what truth there is in them.

On the rumour of having simply vanished into an obsession that led to his death

Arrayne the Troubadour had an apprentice named Ysabel. She kept a journal which, if truth be told. Is mostly dreadful attempts at lyrics and poetry by one, who if they were destined to be a troubadour at all, must have had much skill at music. In it, though, she writes occasionally of Arrayne. One passage comments on that last meeting with Drustan.

“Arrayne has been to see the relentless Briar again. They always return frustrated from those meetings lately. Often they are ranting about how Drustan will listen to no one and won't tell anyone anything either. This time

was a bit different though. They said they wouldn't be seeing each other again. I asked why. Arrayne said they couldn't remember any details, but that Drustan had a plan. A huge plan. "How could you not remember if it was so huge?" I asked and Arrayne looked at me and said "yes, how could that happen to a troubadour who spent their life focusing on retaining details?" They didn't say so, but I suspect Night magic"

Ysabel quickly turns to the idea of a night mage she knows and might speak to, to ask, but the page turns quickly to youthful daydreaming, nothing of more use. As a researcher though, I ask the question "if there was something worth hiding with night magic, then perhaps there was a plan worth knowing about rather than just a Briar caught in the obsessions of their lineage?" I cannot find evidence of it though. Nothing for the forty years or more following that last meeting.

On the name, recurring into the present

Whilst I was exploring the records of The Silent Bell, I did discover, many years on, in 349YE a reference to an investigation of a group of presumed spring cultists working in Liathave. The records are not clear about exactly what they were doing but the investigation was designed to explore if "they were aggravating the Vallorn in Liathaven in such a way as to bring disaster to the Navarr rather than defence against the Jotun". The name given for their presumed leader is Durstan the Evergreen.

It seems that then, as now, in the situation regarding those who call themselves Heirs of Terunael, that the name of Drustan or Durstan is favoured by those causing a stir. Whether they are inspired by, or children of Drustan of the Briar, I cannot tell.

Of course any or all of them, including the Briar himself, might be named for that earlier figure, Drustan Green Water.

On his inability to be diplomatic

It seems, from the records already reported on, that tell of the political speeches made against the Dance of Navarr and Thorn, that those writers were surprised by his lack of political acumen – thinking that it went beyond even the usual impulsiveness of a Briar.

Had those chroniclers of the time been accustomed to looking into Conclave records, they might have been less surprised. At the height of his battle

proWess, in the late 250's YE Drustan (sometimes noted in the Conclave records as Durstan, which is perhaps how the confusion arises) he made several speeches about the Spring realm, claiming that only Briar and Navarri had the strength and understanding to wield the magic of that realm properly.

The Archmages of Spring of the period seem to have consistently been of Briar lineage – whether down to Drustan's influence or not, so are likely not to have had a problem with this stance. The Navarri seem to have been split between a willingness to claim that superiority over the rest of the Empire and those who hated being raised to share a platform with the Briar, no matter his influence and success.

On the rumour that he alone discovered the defence of venom against the Vallorn

I found notes from a Urizeni general of 266YE, Lauriel of Solemn Fields. A Briar who documented her fight to retain Arete on campaign. Among her many notes, she left a list, which she has marked at the bottom with "Recommendations from Drustan of the Briar" His suggestions, from the time before his strange obsessions, when he was at the height of his youthful thrust against the Vallorn, are listed in abbreviated form. I have not reproduced the pictorial marginalia, but Lauriel's Arete manifests as most beautiful patterns of swirls around the perfunctory text.

- ❖ Persuade Senate to remove prohibition Scorpion's Sting
- ❖ Find out Celyn Blades of Seren sung in Lay of Glaw. Ancient venom blades? Location? In song? Recreate?
- ❖ Eternal aid. Touch of the Vile Humours – stronger? Even if just for one push.
- ❖ Winter/Spring mage. Winter curses territory/person similarities. Same for Spring?

Produced by Sonya Sloev, Civil Servant in the Department of Historical Research

RESEARCH ON THE HEIRS OF TERUNÆL BY THE SILENT BELL

Autumn 383YE

The Heirs of Terunael are traitors to the dream of the Navarr. Most recently they helped drive the chaos in the Liathaven and Brocéliande, working with the monstrous Children of Yaw'nagrah to spread the vallorn's terrible green grasp.

With their defeat in Brocéliande, the assumption is that they will be forced to fall back... and assumption that could have been dangerously premature.

Fortunately, the vigilance of the Assembly of Nine has set the Silent Bell to investigate their activities - and discovered that far from receding they are gathering in force in Therunin, Hercynia, and Liathaven. Now they are poised to drive the vallornspawn into a murderous frenzy that, while it won't spread the vallorn's infestation, could be disastrous for the Navarr nation.

Overview

The Silent Bell are a loose affiliation of pilgrims from every nation devoted to the virtue of Vigilance. In addition to the core membership there are supporters and affiliates in every part of the Empire. During the Summer Solstice, the Assembly of Nine sent the Silent Bell to investigate the dangerous group who call themselves the Heirs of Terunael - a timely decision as it turns out.

The so-called Heirs of Terunael appear to be humans - predominantly with briar lineage - who wish to spread the influence of the vallorn for some reason. There is some evidence that this group is just the latest iteration of a conspiracy that has been active in the Empire - especially among the Navarr - for years. Groups such as the Whispering Drays - a gathering of briars who sought some mad communion with the vallorn - may have been influenced by the Heirs of Terunael. There is some evidence that survivors of these groups, and others like them, have come together in loose alliance with the Heirs to put their various unhinged schemes into operation.

They are best known for their involvement in the recent chaos in Liathaven and Brocéliande, working in collusion with the Children of Yaw'nagrah to spread the vallorns through those territories. With their defeat in Brocéliande, the assumption is that they will be forced to regroup and

provide a degree of respite to the Empire... an assumption that could have been dangerously premature.

Fortunately, the vigilance of the Assembly of Nine has been rewarded. Far from falling back, the Heirs of Terunael appear to be doubling down on their insane schemes. They have already gathered in force in Therunin and Hercynia - perhaps explaining why they were relatively absent in the recent fight in Brocéliande. There are even reports of what appears to be activity by the Heirs in Liathaven and perhaps even further afield.

According to the Silent Bell, the Heirs have largely abandoned Brocéliande, focusing their attention elsewhere. They also appear to have changed their tactics somewhat. Rather than attempting to spread the vallorn, they are focusing their efforts on the multitude of beasts that dwell within it - the vallornspawn. If not for the foresight of the Assembly of Nine the Empire would have been taken entirely by surprise - as it is there is some chance to prepare for the imminent attacks.

One piece of good news is that while the Green Mother may be allied to the Heirs of Terunael, her ability to support their efforts directly is heavily constrained by the Conclave who have declared her to be an enemy of the Empire. Unfortunately, this does nothing to prevent her providing the Heirs of Terunael with boons and gifts they may use to pursue their goals, nor to stop those idolatrous fools who worship the *Mother of Briars*.

Hercynia

The first gathering of the Heirs of Terunael that the Silent Bell have identified is in Hercynia. Initially gathering in the Treji, and in the southern woods, they have also send expeditions deep into the heart of the vallorn - into Deer's Folly. It has been some years since the vallorn of Hercynia has been active, but its infrequent excursions have been of unmatched viciousness.

Right now, the Silent Bell can confirm as many as sixty Heirs of Terunael moving around the borders of Deer's Folly, with no way to tell how many more may be in the depths of the region. The Heirs have already begun rousing the ettercaps and vallornspawn that dwell in the dark heart of Hercynia. There have been a few scattered encounters already - a steading in Summersend assaulted; a striding in the Glen of Shadows decimated while pausing on the borders of the vallorn.

The Silent Bell are also concerned that there are Heirs of Terunael - or sympathisers - hiding in plain sight in the steadings of Hercynia prepared to sow chaos through acts of sabotage and murder as soon as the vallornspawn begin to move. Even more worryingly, there have been reports of at least two groups of Varushkan cabalists coming along the eastern road into Treji before disappearing. The Silent Bell's resources are stretched, but it does appear at least one of these groups belonged to the ominously titled "Cabal of the Green Mother" from northern Volodmartz.

Shortly before the Autumn Equinox, the waters of Hercynia begin to show signs that they have been infested with malign Spring magic; it does not take long for the vates to identify that someone has laid Rivers Run Red over Hercynia, bringing with it the threat of infection and sickness - and further rousing the vallornspawn's bloodlust.

The vallorn of Hercynia is contained in a single region, but its central position means that it is a serious threat to Summersend, the Glen of Shadows, and Old Ranging. Northpines is relatively secure from the vallornspawn; there has not been a major incursion into the mountains since they were first liberated and no sign the Heirs of Terunael are active in the mountain peaks. Those same mountains present a barrier between Hercynia and Hahnmark, meaning that the Silent Bell do not believe the Winterfolk will be directly threatened - not yet at any rate. If the chaos is allowed to spread however there is every chance that vallornspawn abominations might venture as far as Kalpamark or even spill out into Skarsind.

Therunin

If the Heirs of Terunael were only active in Hercynia, it would be bad enough... but the Silent Bell report that they are also gathering in Therunin. There are fewer Heirs here as far as the Silent Bell can ascertain - perhaps no more than fifty - but the vallorn of Therunin is considerably larger. In addition to the vallornspawn, the Heirs are riling up the great insects and there are reports of at least one vallorn-infected marshwalker along the shores of the Feverwater. Messengers were quickly dispatched to the Great Forest Orcs in Lower Tarn Valley to warn them of the coming danger.

Worse, while the Heirs themselves are not as concentrated here it appears that they are receiving additional support from the Children of Yaw'nagrah. A Urizeni coven of briar magicians and sentinels from Peregro have come down out of the mountains and launched a precipitous attack against Peakedge Stead.

Their assault was supported by lesser heralds of Yaw'nagrah no doubt called up with their ritual magic. The attack was repulsed - and went some way toward tipping the hand of the Heirs in Therunin - but most of them were able to escape back into Sweetglades.

One of the captured sentinels was questioned and while they were extremely uncooperative they provided ample evidence that the mages of Greenfountain Spire have been idolatrous worshippers of the Mother of Briars - Yaw'nagrah - for generations. Before falling silent, he raved about the Green Mother's message - that now was the time to cover the Empire in blessed trees once again and the vallorn was the tool with which to do it.

As in Hercynia, shortly before the Autumn Equinox someone raised the potent curse Rivers Run Red in Therunin. Three days after the first taint was spotted in the water, however, the magic sustaining the curse broke apart. News quickly came from the Lower Tarn Valley that the magicians of the Great Forest Orcs had taken immediate action using one of the rituals the Empire shared with them after their arrival - casting Rivers of Life to neutralise the threat posed by the pestilent Spring magic. The orcs are making their further preparations - the Spears of the Pine will protect their settlements and the building site of the Holt of the Oak.

Liathaven

The Silent Bell have limited resources in Liathaven, but as soon as they became aware of the threat posed in Hercynia and Therunin they were quick to send some of their agents west to check on Liathaven. They were able to confirm that there are a number of Heirs of Terunael here although its difficult to gauge how many. As Liathaven is outside the Empire, they are able to receive significant assistance from the Children of Yaw'nagrah. According to the Silent Bell, both the Heirs and the Children are operating more openly here - although they must still exercise some caution lest they attract the ire of the Jotun orcs who control the territory.

Liathaven labours under the effect of the powerful Winter magic curse laid by the Navarr themselves - but while Wither the Seed makes the vallorn and its spawn sluggish it does not prevent the Heirs and their allies from rousing the creatures. Worse, in a pattern that is now becoming predictable, as the Autumn Equinox approaches there are signs that the Heirs have raised Rivers Run Red in Liathaven as well. With nobody there to remove the ritual, and with the

territory unreachable from the Imperial regio, it is likely that its full effects will be felt once the vallornspawn begin to move.

There are very few Imperial citizens left in Liathaven which is perhaps a small mercy. Those that remain will do their best to fight the vallornspawn, but they are outclassed and outnumbered and must be careful not to attract the attention of the Jotun. For their part, the orcs appear largely unaware of the threat gathering under the eaves of Liath's Heart.

Fortunately for the Empire, it seems that while the Heirs of Terunael may be able to rouse the vallornspawn, the sluggishness caused by Wither the Seed means that even if the territory is left entirely to its own devices they are unlikely to spread beyond the borders of the forests - meaning that Kahraman, Mournwold, Bregasland, and Hordalant are probably safe at least for the moment.

The Jotun in Liathaven

Most of Liathaven is still under control of the Jotun. It is not clear if they have any armies there at the moment, but they certainly have some presence. The Silent Bell believe that they are entirely unaware of the threat of the Heirs of Terunael. It may be possible to get a message to the Jotun and alert them to the threat. One obvious way to do this would be to use the Call Winged Messenger ritual - provided the caster has sufficient information to ensure such a message reached its destination of course. There may be other ways, but ideally such a message would be communicated to a Jotun with some influence - it will be no use sending a random orc warrior as a messenger.

Given their commitment to their thralls it is likely that with some warning the Jotun might mobilise their own troops in defence of the territory. On the other hand, if the vallornspawn butcher large numbers of their thralls and warriors in a surprise attack, they might pull out of Liathaven completely, potentially making it easier for the Empire to conquer the regions they currently control.

Technically of course offering aid to the Jotun could be considered treason - "Aiding barbarians, eternal or foreign powers to act against the interests of the Empire" - so it might be advisable to speak to Chief Magistrate Karkovitch before doing so.

Sküld

The Silent Bell have reports of one final group of Heirs of Terunael taking action following the Summer Solstice, but they believe they are no longer in the Empire. There are unverified reports of what seem to be a score or so Heirs of Terunael heading north-east out of Suvretz into Otkodov - specifically into southern Sküld where a vallorn is believed to lie in uneasy slumber. The easternmost territory of the Thule is beyond the remit of the Silent Bell, but they believe their information is reliable.

As with Liathaven, Sküld is not protected by the declarations of the Imperial Conclave so it is likely the Heirs would be able to secure the assistance of Yaw'nagrah with whatever scheme they are hatching in the north. It is also difficult to know whether the Thule are aware of the threat or not - or how they would respond. There is a small chance of danger to the Empire - in theory any vallornspawn raised in Sküld are as likely to come west into Volodmartz as they are to press north further into Otkodov. After all, it is believed that the vallorn does not much care for the frigid climate of the far north. Still, for the moment at least, the threat of whatever the Heirs are doing in Otkodov seems confined the Thule lands.

Historical Research Request into The Heirs of Terunael

Following the report by The Silent Bell a Historical Research request was put forward to see if more could be uncovered about the group's roots. Unfortunately, no new information was discovered. However, discussions with an Imperial researcher gave more of an insight into why they couldn't provide concrete results. Most avenues of research lead back to two factors Drustan (or Durstan) the briar and the research done into his life and Liathaven. The researcher advised that, if possible, the spy network in Liathaven should be utilised to help understand more about the Heirs and their workings.

A VIRTUOUS WAR – SYNOD JUDGEMENTS

WINTER 381YE

Judgement 35 by Raewyn Eternal

“To all Imperial citizens, let it be known that when someone falls in the Vallorn miasma, they do not die. The terrible Vallorn keeps them on the brink of death and puppets their bodies, trapping their souls, unable to move on to the Labyrinth or cross the Abyss.



The Navarr National Assembly now considers the destruction of the Vallorn and release of the souls trapped within to be the most important spiritual endeavour of the Empire. We call upon our fellow nations to dedicate themselves to this cause.”

Navarr National Assembly, Upheld 146 - 0 (Greater Majority)

SPRING 382YE

Judgement 47 by Malachai of the Shattered Tower

“...when someone falls in Vallorn miasma, they do not die, trapping their souls...” - Navarr National Assembly, Winter 381YE.

The National Assembly believes that walking the trods to weaken the Vallorn now also has a religious calling, and that walking the trods should be encouraged for all nations to save as many souls as we can.”

Highguard National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority (538 - 0).

Judgement 49 by Raewyn Eternal

“The Vallorn spawn husks have souls trapped with them, both human and orc, including Imperial souls. This can be observed by the use of Insight upon the husk. The Advisor on the Vallorn, Siân Eternal, has collated evidence of this. This, the Vallorn, is the greatest spiritual threat to the Empire.”

General Assembly, Upheld (969 - 213)

Judgement 90 by Alban

“Following the Assembly of Nine stating that the Vallorn are the greatest spiritual threat to the Empire AND that husks trap souls, we the Navarr Assembly believe that EVERY priest should preach that message to their congregation to warn off the threat.”

Navarr National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority (148- 0)



The Vallorn are the greatest spiritual threat to the Empire

SUMMER 382YE

Judgement 23 by Kerem of the Chantry

“The monstrous infestation that is the vallorn is a danger beyond any other that now faces us. There is no sacrifice so great that we cannot meet it to defeat this terror. We send Lilith of the Chantry with 500 liao to urge every Highborn citizen to consider if they could assist in defeating this threat by undertaking an extended pilgrimage to walk the trods.”

Highborn National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority (595 - 244; margin of 351). Lilith of the Chantry provided 500 liao after the Summer Solstice.

Notes: *The Throne used their Custodian of Virtue power to cause this mandate to require a Greater Majority.*

AUTUMN 382YE

Judgement 5 by Rane Sherarding

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Rane Sherarding with 50 liao to urge every Wintermark citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Wintermark National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority (272 - 0). Rane Sherarding provided 50 liao after the Autumn Equinox. The Wintermark nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 7 by Corey Wayfarer

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Corey Wayfarer with 25 liao to urge every Navarri citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Navarr National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority (196 - 0). Corey Wayfarer provided 25 liao, the Navarr nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 13 by Amulius Nikephoros

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send ~~Amulius~~ Medea Ruth with 25 liao to urge every Urizen citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Urizen National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority. (149 - 0). Medea Ruth provided 25 liao after the Autumn Equinox. The Urizen nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 14 by Astrid Fjellrevening Rezia di Tassato

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Astrid Fjellrevening Rezia di Tassato with 50 liao to urge every League citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

League National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority. (282 - 0). Astrid Fjellrevening Rezia di Tassato provided 50 liao, and the League nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 15 by Romande Remys

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Lord Romande Remys with 50 liao to urge every Dawnish citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Dawn National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority (154 - 0). Lord Romande Remys provided 50 liao after the Autumn Equinox. The nation of Dawn will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 24 by Immeldar i Ezmara i Erigo

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Immeldar i Ezmara i Erigo with 50 liao to urge every Brass Coast citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Brass Coast National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority. (92-0). Immeldar i Ezmara i Erigo provided 50 liao after the Autumn Equinox. The Brass Coast nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 37 by Skywise Tulva

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Skywise Tulva with 50 liao to urge every Imperial Orc citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Imperial Orc National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority. (65-0). 50 liao provided by Skywise Tulva after the Autumn Equinox. The Imperial Orc nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

Judgement 42 by Father Nikolovitch Drakov

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Father Drakov with 50 liao to urge every Varushkan citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together.”

Varushka National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority. (65-0). Father Drakov provided 50 liao after the Autumn Equinox. The Varushkan nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.



Judgement 46 by Sister Meredith

“The war against the Vallorn demands all the support of all of us. We send Hrodin with 50 liao to urge every Marcher citizen to offer food, shelter, and protection to the pilgrims as they travel through our lands and beyond. We will shoulder this burden together..”

The Marches National Assembly, Upheld with a Greater Majority. (65-0). Hrodin provides 50 liao after the Autumn Equinox, and the Marcher nation will help to mitigate the impact of the Highborn decision to walk the trods.

SPRING 383YE

Judgement 19 by Kerem of the Chantry

“The Grey Pilgrims were called to walk the trods and spread the way. We left our homes to face the greatest spiritual threat facing the Empire. Do not dilute our mission.”

General Assembly, Upheld (1094- 232).

PILGRIMAGES OF THE GREAT CHOREOGRAPHY



In the wake of the Grey Pilgrimage joining the Stridings of Navarr I have consulted the previous documents and my Guides to create pilgrimage routes that follow the trods. Specifically, they follow the paths the exemplars Navarr (Wisdom) and Thorn (Ambition) took in re-establishing the Trods in their new purpose of draining the Spring magic of the Vallorn.

Sian Eternal, with the guidance of Ranulf Farkas, Raewyn Eternal and Harwyn Eternal.

THE GREAT CHOREOGRAPHY – THE INTRODUCTION

Navarr and Thorn began their journey in Miaren, the territory that would see the defeat of the first Vallorn heart. Today it is a safe and defensible territory in the heart of the Empire. Whilst here there are a few sites worth visiting;

The first is Rhonwen's Fall where the first Binding of Thorns was sworn and a nation was founded. In less peaceable times, when the Navarr spent more time hiding from barbarians than hunting them, it was a refuge named Sanctuary Falls. It was renamed in 30YE in honour of the **archmage** Rhonwen who gave her life to help defeat the vallorn of Miaren. The steading is built into the cliff under falls that feed the upper reaches of the Gancio. The settlement attracts scholars from across the Empire who wish to study the swirling intricate designs that the first Navarr carved into the rocks here, designs that contain information about trods and old ritual dances.

Second is The Pool of Silver Clouds, many tales tell of Navarr herself visiting these waters. Nestled in the southern foothills of the Locul peaks it is a still pool in a quiet glade which, whatever the weather, reflects silver clouds and a blue sky. It is said that some vates can divine the future in the waters of the pool.

And finally, Serenael. The ruins of the Terunael city of Seren lie in northern Serenael; this is where the dark heart of the Miaren vallorn lay. The Golden Trees of Seren is a sprawling weirwood forest that covers much of northern Serenael and encompasses roughly a third of the Terunael ruins. The rest of the ruins are given over to the largest permanent Navarr settlement – the city of Seren.

The ruins of Seren have been extensively explored and catalogued, and many of the facts the Empire knows about the Terunael were uncovered here. At the height of Terunael, Seren was a city known for its scholars and poets, and for both colleges and military academies. Several of these buildings were reclaimed when the vallorn fell, and while no writing survived exposure to the heart of corruption, a combination of divination magic and tireless archaeology slowly teased out some of the secrets of the Terunael.

From here Navarr, Thorn and their compatriots travelled to Astolat. As you follow in their footsteps it is worth considering visiting Boar's Hollow. A great statue of a boar, fully 20 hands high, moss covered and inscribed with writings of Terunael, stands here in a small hollow, apparently watching the border with Varushka. Some amongst the Dawnish regard it as a place of fertility. Whilst this location is a mystery at present seeing artifacts of a time before the Vallorn gives a lot to ponder on.

Next Broceliande, arguably the most difficult leg of the pilgrimage as the vallorn here is most widespread but that makes it all the more important that the trods are walked here. Aid can be found in Eleri's Stead or by entering the territory through Semmerholm and into Boar's Dell.

From there it's into Reikos and perhaps to High Chalcis, a great work going from strength to strength and home to apothecaries and healers. It is also a testament to the friendship between Navarr and Highguard with neighbouring Therunin helping support the Highborn of the mount when needed.

Speaking of Therunin, that is the territory Navarr and Thorn extended the trods into next. From Chalcis Mount it is a short journey to Peakedge Song. One of the most important sites in the territory, Peakedge Stead is found in the western part of the territory. A place of contemplation, of houses in the trees where the Navarr can see across the hills of Reikos to the forests beyond. Some stories

claim the steading is a remnant of long-lost Terunael; there is something ageless about the trees here.

The Upper Tarn Valley is worth consideration including in the pilgrimage route. The largest steading in the area is Return, a well-fortified settlement surrounded by tall watch towers that look out across the forests to the north and east. A place of flowers and memory, the steading has a storied history, revolving around the tale of a Brand who spent too much time amongst the barbarians and became too much like them - where Stridings pass to remember what happens when you forget that you are human, and they are not. It is also the place where the extent of Yaw'nagrah's meddling with the Vallorn in recent years was discovered.

From Therunin Navarr and Thorn made their way back home, travelling first back through Reikos and into Casinea before coming back to Miaren. Whilst passing through Casinea it is worth stopping in Anvil, for it's through the founding and expansion of the Empire and cooperation of the Nations that the trods were able to be spread.

THE GREAT CHOREOGRAPHY – THE FIRST VERSE

Having already spent somewhere between 20 and 30 years on the first part of their Great Journey, Navarr, Thorn and their coven(s) set out once more. This was a quicker undertaking but not without its troubles.

They made their way to Liathaven, travelling through Upwold, Mitwold, Mournwold and Bregasland. The Eastern Guard in Upwold is worth travelling through. Great crenelated walls and brooding towers look down from Eastern Guard onto the northern forest of Miaren. Built early in the history of the Marches in Birchland, the garrison was initially charged both with remaining vigilant against Dawnish aggression, and with maintaining readiness for attacks from the Vallornspawn of the deep woods.

Since Miaren was cleansed in the early days of the Empire, and since the people of Dawn are now an allied nation, the castle has become more open - it is a popular stopping place for merchants travelling through the central Empire. Still, the dour Marchers ensure it maintains battle readiness at all times, for one never knows when an attack may come from an unexpected direction.

At the time of writing this it may be difficult to spend time in parts of Liathaven given the presence of the Jotun. However, when the territory is more secure or if the pilgrims are careful and well prepared there are several sites of interest in the territory.

Liaven's Glen **is** of particular note. This area of eastern Liathaven was the first area of Liathaven freed of Vallorn influence some two hundred years before the foundation of the Empire. Woven between the trees of Liaven's Glen is The Dance; a network of earthen trails marked in the grass and the trees, several miles wide, worn into the ground with the footfall of centuries. The Navarr say that it is a symbol for the Great Dance writ large on the earth. Some from Urizen believe that dancing Liaven's Dance could grant humans a greater understanding the path of the soul through the Labyrinth of Ages.

The **steading** of Liaven's Dance was ancient, dating back to the earliest days after the Vallorn emerged. It was a regular place of pilgrimage for Navarr practitioners of the Way, and a centre for philosophical thought combining the philosophy of the Great Dance with the Virtues. The fact that it is now in the hands of the Jotun barbarians marks a terrible loss for the Navarr and perhaps the Empire. Several other steadings here were home to experienced covens of

vates who oversaw potent mana sites and studied the vallorn along the edges of Liath's Heart to the south-west.

Of particular note is the library at Turning Spiral. This old steading held a repository of Navarr magical lore that survived the purges of Emperor Nicovar comparatively unscathed. Tragically, its own defenders were forced to destroy it rather than let it fall into barbarian hands.

The Paths of Lan Thúven are also in the territory. In Western Scout, stand the crumbling pillars of an old gateway. The Gate of Lan Thúven dates back to pre-Imperial times; it may even be Terunael in origin. No stories remain to say who, or what, or where Lan Thúven might have been. Only the gate remains - this one, and a second gate in West Ranging on the far side of Liathaven. At one time a path between these gates, a hidden way woven with Night magic, allowed the Navarr to travel through the Vallorn unscathed. In pushing back the Vallorn presence here the paths have lost their magic but the gates remain places of interest.

THE GREAT CHOREOGRAPHY – THE REFRAIN

From Liathaven Navarr and Thorn spread their influence, and the trods, to the north. Unfortunately, we currently don't have records of this part of their journey and can only speculate the route they took. I will update this part of the pilgrimage if new information comes to light.

However it stands to reason they travelled to the next Vallorn heart, Hercynia. The direct trod route to there is through Bregasland once more and on to Kallavesa.

Whilst it does not relate to the Vallorn or the battle against it there is another route to follow in the territory – The Pilgrims Trail, a journey of virtue worth consideration while passing through the territory or as another pilgrimage to undertake after completing The Great Choreography.

From Kallavesa the trods go through Hahnmark and into Hercynia. The northern Navarri territory has a few places of significance to welcome pilgrims at the end of their journey.

The Blade of Thorn an intricate knot of paths in the slopes of Old Ranging, the Blade of Thorn is shaped by the winding of small rods and banks of heather. Built at the request of Rhisiart Dancemaker it is a site of memorial and pride to those who have given their lives in support of the Empire and whose unnumbered names are carved into stone menhirs that periodically line the earthen slopes. Visitors to the site are encouraged to chisel the names of fallen heroes to the stones by the Blade's rest wayhouse, used as a hostel by those who maintain the work.

Also, Summersend hosts a number of Terunael ruins. One noteworthy example is The Gate of Summer. Two huge stones and a top lintel stand in the middle of a clearing, carved about with boar, deer and other game, and symbols representing summer. It is covered in moss, and no-one has ever seen a hint of any magic from it.

There are also several other well-explored Terunael ruins. Many steadings are built on a foundation of old Terunael structures, and it is from here that the push to drive back the Vallorn is overseen.

There are several old battlefields here, most dating back to pre-Imperial times and to attempts by the Vard ancestors of the Varushkans to conquer Hercynia. Most of these battlefields have long since been forgotten but one, - Mourning Hollow on the very south-eastern borders. It is now the site of the Great Library of Hacynian, overseen by the Advisor on the Vallorn the library is a central repository of lore surrounding Terunael, its fall and the phenomena of the Vallorn. It has been constructed as much as possible in the style of the old ruins, incorporating their original stone wherever possible. The structure is not especially large, but it is exceptionally beautiful, filled with shelves of scrolls and parchments written by students of Navarr history. It also incorporates a small shrine dedicated to the virtue of Wisdom.

THE VALLORN

By Talek Dancewalker

Spring 379YE

In this document I will try to answer some important questions and distinctions. What is the difference between a Vallorn and a Vallorn infestation? What is a Vallorn Miasma? What dwells in a Vallorn? How can we combat a Vallorn? How do Trods work? Hopefully this will allow someone reading it to gain a clearer idea of what the Vallorn is and will stop misinformation. I am happy to update this document as needed and as more information comes to the light.

What is the Vallorn?

It is often easy to get confused by what the Vallorn is, mainly because we use the word to mean a variety of things. Put simply, the Vallorn is a geographical feature, the fallout from when the massive Tellurnial ritual was done. It is an area of land that corrupts and poisons all within it, causing the plants and beasts to mutate and attack all those who would venture into it. The dust and the pollen is mutated to form some sort of miasma that will Venom those who breath it in, or give those who live near it Greenlung.

The Vallorn is not a creature, it is not sentient and it does not have any linked intelligence between the creatures there. We assign personalities to the Vallorn based on how the creatures in their act, which may add to some of the confusion, however, the Vallorn itself is an area of corrupted Spring magic.

What is a Vallorn Miasma?

The Miasma is caused by the spring magic affecting the air and the effects of pollen and dust from the corrupted trees and plants. The miasma goes through the skin, so masks can be used to slow down the infection for a few minutes, but generally it will go through any part of revealed skin and effect the lungs. Sometimes the miasma is visible as a green or yellow mist but too often it is hard to see at all. Sometimes the Vallorn Miasma can cause the same affects to a living creature as Venom, but more often it will cause Green Lung which is a fatal condition as the miasma attacks the lungs. It can be cured by drinking an infusion of Bladeroot but Spring magic such as the Blood of the Hydra would be needed to regrow and restore the lungs. It is likely that this needs to be done under surgery since the Vate would need to get to the exposed lungs.

The Miasma will cause bodies to rot away and other items to decay strongly. We have found no magical way to get rid of the miasma, apart from in Miaren where destroying the Vallorn has stopped the miasma.

What is a Vallorn Infestation?

People sometimes try to take the corrupted plants from the Vallorn and regrow them to spread the Vallorn for their own vile purposes. I have no comprehension why people would wish to do this, however, they are often confused. What happens is that they are moving the corrupted plants and regrowing the corrupting plants. This may make more corrupted plants and this may create a Vallorn miasma from the dust. This does not create a new Vallorn that would take magics that as far as we are aware were above the majority of the Terunael civilisation.

Sometimes Vallornspawn will move to an area, this generally will not create a miasma, but they may be hungry or attracted there somehow. More often the winds will catch the miasma and Vallorn spawn will travel where the miasma goes.

What are Vallorn Spawn?

Vallorn spawn is a generic name for the creatures that dwell in the Vallorn Miasma, as well as the creatures that are corrupted by the Vallorn. There is something intrinsically linked between these creatures as is shown by that the Winter Ritual, the Ward of the Black Waste will weakened all of these creatures.



The most common of these creatures is a Vallorn Husk. These creatures are husks of those who have died in a Vallorn Miasma that have been filled by the Vallorn corrupted plants. This is a highly painful process for someone who is terminal and the best thing to do is to execute them and preferably cast turn the circle. If you do not have a spring vate present, make sure that you dismember bodies to make sure that they cannot regrow. These creatures are passive when they do not sense any hostile presence and spend time in wet areas or in sunlight, seemingly to nourish the plants inside them. If they sense living creatures (or non-Vallorn touched creatures) they gain a sudden burst of spring energy. This energy means that they will move rapidly towards the living creature and attack it

ferociously, trying to find a new host for their plants. Vallorn Husks can resist a lot of damage and the plants seem to regrow to bind together flesh whilst on the floor. The best way to deal with them is to decapitate them whilst they are on the ground, or more affectively by using Venom either by spell, oil of blackthorn or by using a Scorpion's Sting. IF the Husk is still terminal it can still be a foe, but retain the sentience of the creature. Do not be fooled, it is the husk in control and the best thing to do is to kill them and put them out of their suffering.

A Vallornspawn Hulk is a special type of Vallorn Husk that are created when an Ogre or other large creature is killed in a Miasma. These creatures act just like Vallorn Husks, but due to their large size they are must stronger and can resist the Venom. These creatures need to be taken down by Thorns and decapitated.

A Dryad is the name for a Vallornspawn Husk who has taken the body of a Briar. Due to the link to the link Briar's have with the Spring Realm they continue to grow bark after they have become Husks. These creatures seem to retain a heightened intelligence, or at least instinct, after their death and can channel their spring magic to heal other Husks. They are a dangerous foe and depending on their age can grow as large as a Vallornspawn Hulk. The larger, older Drayds are immune to venom due to their size, the younger, smaller ones can be killed just as easily.



The Ettercaps are the creatures that are the majority of the Vallorn. They normally dwell deep within the Vallorn Miasma and are found when venturing towards the heart of the Vallorn. The Ettercaps are generally bug like humanoids that seem to have some rudimentary sentience. Sometimes with claws and sometimes with weapons these creatures travel in packs and will try to overwhelm their opponents.

Some of the more intelligent Ettercaps will use magics although these are extremely rare. Generally the Ettercaps will use natural venoms and herbs to support themselves in combat. Often they will use Husks to attack and then strike on force to a single point, They are sometimes accompanied by Dire Spiders. These massive creatures can devastate a small

unit and seem resilient to most weapons, striking with a venomous bite and spitting venom over small areas.

How do you combat a Vallorn?

The build up of Vallorn energies needs to be removed before you can destroy the Vallorn completely. Navarr and Thorn performed a great ritual that created the Trod Network. When the Trods have dispersed enough energy from a Vallorn, the miasma is weakened enough that armies can fight against the Vallorn Spawn that dwell in that area. It is also possible to use Winter Magics to counter the Vallorn Spawn in an area by casting Wither the Seed, this will not harm the Vallorn but it will cut down the Vallorn Spawn and mean that the territory is easier to take.

Attacking a Vallorn when it still is at full energy would be suicide. The current amount of Trods will keep the Vallorn from spreading, if we start losing territories then this may allow the Vallorn to spread again and we need to make sure that we do not lose to the Barbarians. To defeat the Vallorn we need to wait hundreds more years or to expand the trod network. I surmise that at the point that the Trod Network is the same size as the original Terunael Empire then we shall have enough strength to combat all the Vallorn within our lifetime.

What actually are the Trods?

The Trods are what our way of life is based upon. Stridings walk the Trods to make sure that the energy is dispersed, Steadings guard the Trods and make sure that they can provide for the Stridings who are performing the ritual. Walking a trod is part of a great ritual, the

Spring Magic from the Vallorn is imparted into those walking it and although this gives them great energy so they can walk for further, the major part of the ritual is to disperse the energy.

As an analogy, the Vallorn would be lakes of corrupted spring energy and the Trods are irrigation channels that drain the energy away. Walking the trods produces the current that will drain the energy.

For those Navarr who distrust Spring magic, they need to remember that performing a Spring Ritual is what makes us Navarr. This is what our way of life is. They need to trust the Spring Vates about what is a good use of this power and what is now.

All Imperial Territories have working Trods in them, although the lost Territories of Liathaven, Spiral and The Mournwold have had their Trods eroded due to lack of walking them fully. Although these Trods can be remade with the Dance of Navarr and Thorn, we need to aid in the taking of these areas to allow the ritual to be cast.

Brocéliande is where the Dance of Navarr and Thorn was first performed. Although it is not in Imperial Territory, the Navarr here walk through the Vallorn. It is interesting to note that it is not the fact that the territory is not imperial controlled that stops the Navarr walking it, it is the fact that Barbarians stop the Navarr walking it. There are Steadings in the vallorn territories in all the Navarr territories and Stridings regularly walk those Trods.

In 75YE and 245YE Trods were created in the Barrens. It was confirmed by some of the Orcs from the Barrens that the Great Forest of Peytah was not happy with the creation of Trods in that area. Whether the Barrens Orcs themselves damage them or whether the Great Forest has some supernatural way of combatting the Trods it is still unknown. The Barrens Orcs said that the Great Forest could be placated, so the Trods could still be build there.

Trods cannot be created over water, and although some cross rivers that can be forded it is not possible to create Trods over Seas or even large lakes.

How Many Vallorn Are there?

Each of the Vallorn Hearts are around one of the old Terunael Cities. There are four Vallorn Hearts in the Empire and Three Outside it. One of these is in Skuld in Oktadov, it is likely to spread around the regions of Hahlern, Kógur and Stathas. It would be interesting to find out how the Thule have kept this at bay since there is no Trod Network in Oktodov.

There are also two others to the East, although their locations are unknown. By looking at a map of Terunael it might be possible find the locations of these cities and find out their names.

Why does the Vallorn Exist?

Magic doesn't have side effects, when you have an arcane projection you are aware of the outcome of the ritual. The Vallorn was deliberately created over the major Terunael Cities. The question is why? It was obviously created as a weapon against the Orcs, but it didn't work. The followers of Navarr were still in the Forests, The Urizens, the Suaq, the Kallavesi, the Feni and the Ushkans also in hiding from the Orcs. The Orcs were not defeated, but the Empire was destroyed. The only thing the Vallorn has done is guard their ruins.



MEDICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE VALLORN

By Dr Cadfael Eternal.

First Principles.

As a surgeon or healer, you will deal with Vallorn related conditions from two sources, Gross injury from vallorn-infected creatures and the effects of the Miasma.

Note carefully that miasma is all pervasive and intrusive. Masks and other screens might slow or reduce infection or affliction but DO NOT prevent it. Fortunately, barring massive infection, I have yet to see any secondary infection of attending medics outside of the area of the miasma.

Gross Injury

Gross Injury may be treated in likewise manner to any physical injury but, I stress, any open wounds must be checked for spores, seeds, venom or other alien or unknown elements and dealt with promptly and appropriately. A wash of Bladeroot or similar cleanser has, in my experience, proved effective but do not assume it has worked without secondary inspection.



Envenomation is all too common as both a primary and secondary factor in vallorn related attacks. This may and should be treated by either correct application of Imperial Roseweald or use of Ritual magic.

All too often fighters will unaware or indifferent to being envenomed. As a healer, it is your duty to treat them regardless of obstinance or ignorance.

Miasmatic Conditions

Personal observation and treatment thereof have shown, to date, three main manifestations of having been present in a miasmatic area.

Green Lung is caused by inhalation of spores, this results in both internal growth of fungal-seeming tendrils and the rapid and life-threatening production of fluids and phlegm in the lungs and throat. It may be treated by a hot infusion of Bladeroot, where the inhalation of the vapours from the infusion are VITAL. Reports on the amount of infusion/Bladeroot required per patient are unclear and confusing. This surgeon recommends not stinting and using a full measure of Bladeroot per patient.

Green Vein (my name) has been seen to result from both injury and miasmatic infection of open sores or wounds. In this unpleasant condition, areas of the vascular (blood circulation) system begin to turn green and swollen as plant threads grow within them. The only solution so far is to open the blood vessel and physically remove the threads and the spawning spores.

Green Eye (my name) is caused by spores affecting the moisture around the eyes, resulting in thread growth both in and behind the eye itself. The only solution so far is to physically extract the eye from the socket and manually remove the growth. The application of a cooled bladeroot infusion (surplus from treating Green Lung) will also provide a cleansing and soothing effect before restoration of the eye.

You will note my use of ‘plant threads’ as a term. Be aware that spore affliction can manifest as small green threads but also as vines, fungal blooms and doubtless other floral manifestations.

As always exercise due diligence and after treating an afflicted patient thoroughly wash your tools and hands.

Also be aware as a healer that the vallorn, in its foul abundance, might yet manifest in forms of life unseen and unknown to Imperial Medicine and knowledge. If you should encounter a new manifestation, I urge you to spread knowledge and awareness of it with due Virtue. Lives may be spared by your swift, Wise and Loyal action.

383YE ALMANAC

Against the Vallorn

Battle of Brocéliande

Throughout 383YE, the Empire has been at war in the forest of Brocéliande. It began in late Autumn, when Navarr scouts reported a dangerous rise in vallorn activity in the territory even as the vallorn in Liathaven was being beaten back. Two regions of Brocéliande remained free of vallorn infestation, and it seemed the dreadful vegetable horror sought to reclaim both Elerael and Boar's Dell. As the year progressed, it became clear that this was not some random increase in vallorn activity but something much more sinister, guided and encouraged by servants of the deadly eternal Yaw'nagrah and her treacherous mortal allies.

Yet the Navarr defenders were not without allies of their own. The questing knights and knights errant of Dawn rallied to the cause to defend their friends in Boar's Dell, while the priests and pilgrims of Highguard sent significant aid to the beleaguered inhabitants of Elerael in the form of pious warriors and valuable supplies. At the same time, independent captains came from across the Empire to fight in Brocéliande, to help the Navarr living there preserve their homes. Arrayed against them, mysterious traitors - many of them with briar lineage - working hand-in-hand with the servants of the eternal Yaw'nagrah to urge the vallorn of Brocéliande to wakefulness.

The strength of the vallorn increased season-on-season until the nascent disaster culminated in a great push in the lead-up to the Autumn equinox. With allies both mortal and eternal, the Navarr were able to hold their own against the tide of green destruction and drive it back - weakening the vallorn sufficiently that it may soon prove possible to clear its malign presence from Dark Ranging as well.

Victory in Brocéliande has come at a price, however. The Navarr laid a powerful curse of Winter magic across the territory to help slow and weaken the vallorn advance, and that curse has long-term implications for the people living there and their ability to prosper for at least a generation. Perhaps even more contentiously, that victory was apparently bought with the assistance of the Druj; five thousand hated orcs from the Mallum fought the vallorn in Brocéliande. While many have turned a blind eye to this new alliance between the Navarr and the Druj, the eastern orcs do nothing that does not serve their own interests in some way.

Liberation of Liathaven

Brocéliande is not the first place that Yaw'nagrah and her allies have sought to cause trouble. In 381YE, they were involved in an attempt to push the vallorn of Liathaven to spread northward into West Ranging. At great cost, the Navarr and their Marcher allies held the line against the vallorn and pushed it back – creating an opportunity to strike back against the weakened vallorn.

In Summer this year, that strike fell and the vallorn was driven out of the West Wood. For the first time since the fall of Terunael it is possible to travel from the Marches to the Brass Coast through Liathaven without the threat of the Vallorn. In the process, a great treasure was uncovered – an untouched forest of weirwood trees that had endured the touch of the vallorn unchanged for a thousand years.

The defeat of the vallorn in Liathaven represents a major victory for the Empire, but the territory remains contested between the Empire and the Jotun orcs. The forests also labour under the same powerful Winter curse as Brocéliande, and following the resolution of the Mournwold situation, an unknown number of Feni have settled the forests of Liathaven.

Heirs of Terunael

Even as the Navarr were victorious in Brocéliande, however, their enemies changed target. The so-called Heirs of Terunael – allies of Yaw'nagrah who seem hellbent on seeing the vallorn devour the entire Navarr nation – launched attacks in Liathaven, Hercynia, and Therunin. If not for the timely assignment of the Silent Bell to investigate their activities, the Empire might have been taken by surprise. As it is, the activities of these Heirs and their allies were uncovered in the nick of time, allowing the Empire to potentially intercede and block their attempts to ravage Hercynia and Therunin, and further complicate the chaos in Liathaven.

Rise of the Grey Pilgrims

The Grey Pilgrims were formed in response to the spiritual threat posed by the Vallorn. Drawn from those members of the Highborn nation prepared to commit everything to the war, and following the Navarr example, they have taken to walking the trods in large numbers. This new pilgrimage has come at great cost, but a decision by the Empire to support the Highborn meant that they were not required to bear this cost alone.

As they have travelled the trods, the Grey Pilgrims have continued to develop their role in the Empire, and in the nation of Highguard. Throughout 383YE, the Pilgrims' mandate to seek out heresy, blasphemy, and idolatry was explored. Unfortunately, this exploration lead to conflict with almost all the nations of the Empire. In the end, the General Assembly of the Synod intervened, declaring that the various idiosyncratic practices of individual nations were acceptably orthodox. This brought the growing confusion to an end for all human nations save one.

The exception was Dawn, who took a very different approach. After the Summer Solstice, the Dawnish assembly encouraged troubadours to visit Highguard and show them that love and glory were not incompatible with the virtues. Highguard welcomed the Dawnish priests, and as the Winter approached the two nations' assemblies seem to have become closer than ever before.

RECLAIMING WESTWOOD

“History is written by the victors” is a common turn of phrase that in many ways is true. We feel the ramifications of Emperor Nicovar and similar individuals attempts to audit history to this day. It is only through attempting to keep bias out of reports and/or sharing multiple viewpoints that we will paint a broader and more accurate depiction of noteworthy events going forward.

Owing to my position as Advisor on the Vallorn my viewpoint on the reclamation of Westwood is decidedly focused on my oaths and as such I would find it difficult to write an unbiased point of view. I do however believe it worth sharing my views to ensure they are not lost to time and that the campaign isn't noted as a complete victory.

The following account is comprised mostly of reports and almanacs released at the time edited to past tense and elaborated upon in places by myself.

Sian Eternal.

In the winter of 381YE the Vallorn of Liathaven began to stir. If nothing was done by the Spring Equinox then the vallorn would have expanded to consume West Ranging. That expansion would have seen its growth spent and it was theorised it would then return to its fitful slumber. If the vallorn had been allowed to claim West Ranging then it would have become entrenched there and removing it would have become as difficult as removing it from Liath's Heart. This would have also swallowed the northern end of the Paths of Lan Thúven, most likely rendering them useless.

The alternative was for a significant force of Imperial soldiers to engage the vallorn to push it back. The amount of force required was discerned through the casting of divination rituals, namely Eyes of the Sun and Moon, the Eye of the High Places, and Dreams in the Witch House by ritualists in Anvil. Scouts and spies working with the Liathaven spy network also helped give some idea of the strength of the vallorn's expansion.

There was no chance to strike against Liath's Heart - the core of the vallorn will always be where it is strongest. It wasn't weakened enough yet to be attacked. But if the Empire could absorb the strength of the vallorn as it pushed into West Ranging, if they stopped the expansion then that would drain the

forest enough that the Navarr could sally forth to strike into the Westwood. If that was successful then they could permanently clear the vallorn from the entire region.

Following the Winter Solstice, the Navarr army of the Quiet Step, along with the Marcher armies the Tusks and the Bounders, fought the vallorn expansion in Liathaven. The attempted expansion was blunted, meaning that West Ranging was not infested.

By spring 382YE the Navarr had secured a victory over the vallorn of Liathaven. This was not the first time they had beaten back an attempt by the vallorn to spread its infection - the Black Thorns thwarted a similar event in Eleraël only a few years earlier. Yet the Brocéliande expansion was a significant degree less focused than the attempt to swamp West Ranging. There, it was simply a natural shift as of water rushing in to fill an empty space left by the withdrawal of the Druj. The Liathaven expansion felt like something else, something more immediate. The vallorn itself possesses no sentience, of course, not as a human might understand it. Yet the thorns and vates of the Quiet Step were left in no doubt that there was a power in Liathaven that was not present in Brocéliande, something felt that had yet to reveal itself.

As predicted, though, the victory in Liathaven left the vallorn weakened in some fashion. The vates were clear - it was possible to do more than simply keep the vallorn at bay. There was an opportunity - bought with many lives and with many years of patiently walking the trods - to launch an attack against the Westwood that, if it was backed with enough force it could be sufficient to reclaim that region.

However, while the Navarr and their allies were able to drive the vallorn back from West Ranging, they did not bring enough force to bear to conquer the entire region. The woodland was seared with the hungry fire of Surut but enough remained that the Empire did not control the entire region. As such, Imperial forces were still at a disadvantage in Liathaven - especially if they were to move to attack Westwood. Without control of an adjacent region within the territory, they would suffer hardships for establishing a beachhead unless they could first secure their control of the rest of West Ranging.

Westwood was a part of the vallorn that had remained largely untouched by outside forces for over a thousand years. It represented a significantly greater threat than the forces the Navarr had already faced recently. This opportunity

was significantly *rare though*. An attempt to defeat it was considerably a very risky proposition, but if they did not strike then it would be years before the vallorn was weakened enough to attempt such an assault again. Assuming, of course, that whatever malign force was present in Liathaven did not act first.

To aid in the situation the heroes of Navarr took advantage of a conjunction of the **Sentinel Gate**, they ventured to Liathaven itself, to a Spring regio there, and with the aid of **Freeborn** allies restored the damaged trods surrounding the western vallorn itself.



It was during the Spring Equinox of 382YE that Empress Lisabetta used her power of ‘Defender of the Empire’ to remove control of the Quiet Step from General Brennos Brackensong. She did however appoint him her adjutant and reports following this decision claimed that his removal was to prevent him from immediately taking his army to fight the vallorn despite the Military Council advising against it.

In the end there was insufficient support for the Navarr to immediately take advantage of the opportunity. By summer no Navarr **army** was committed to the territory and the two **Marcher** armies that were campaigning there were withdrawn. For whatever reason, the Empire's eternal wars against their barbarian neighbours took precedence once more. Whatever the reason, the reality was that the priceless opportunity to fight the vallorn was almost certain to be missed unless something radical was done.

The hard truth was that there was simply no way that the Navarr could fight the vallorn without the help of the Empire. The reason that the Navarr worked so hard to found the Empire centuries ago was in part because it represented the best possible chance to turn the tide.

Without the support of the other nations the people of Navarr made the difficult choice to cast the Winter curse **Wither the Seed** upon their lost territory. Already burned beyond repair in places Liathaven would now see thirty years of the life there stifled; though that did include the unnatural vitality of the vallorn. It would take potent magic indeed to rouse it whist the curse hung over the land.

Shortly after the Summer solstice, the forest of Liathaven was severed from the network of trods that crisscrosses the Empire by unknown magic. As it is not Imperial territory would be extremely difficult to restore those trods.

On a more positive note once autumn came around the trods had never been busier. The grey pilgrims of Highguard, a multitude of new travelers taking their first faltering steps in a dance that would lead them across the Empire and back again. The curious walkers of the Great Forest and a handful of their briar brethren, walked alongside the Navarr. Merchants from the west, with ox wagons and brightly coloured coats, eager to take the fastest route to the markets that make their hearts sing.

Another entity walked the trods this season. Having taken more notice of the Vallorn as it could be seen from where the eternal resided in Reikos, Llofir sent a few heralds out to better understand the trods and the phenomenon they contained. Closely monitored and accompanied by vigilant heroes of Anvil (predominantly of Navarr, Highguard and Wintermark) the heralds took in what they were shown and at the Winter solstice returned to Llofir to see what aid he could offer.

It is worth noting at this time that much of the lack of support for Navarr fighting the vallorn, the poisonous threat at the heart of our Empire, was the stance that ‘new warfronts should not be opened given the current number of wars against barbarians’. However, this season saw a magical bridge being built with the aid of a being referring to themselves as the ‘Lady of the Semmerlak’, believed at the time (and later confirmed) to be in the service of Eleonaris. Called the Golden Causeway the bridge allowed the Dawnish to invade Ossium. They made a tactically sound surprise strike on a new front, but a new warfront nonetheless.

It was also at the summit of the Autumn Equinox that the Empress declared her intention to address the Empire. Her words were spread throughout the nations before the Winter Solstice. In her address she spoke of the warfronts and of particular interest to the people of Navarr especially was this excerpt:

The Vallorn threat, spiritual and temporal, has rightly become a concern for the wider Empire. We must keep faith, with the Highborn pilgrims newly walking the trods. With those of all nations who agreed to share prosperity so that the cost is not wholly borne by Highguard. And with those Navarr who have stayed their weapons so that, together, we will strike more surely when the opportunity comes to us again.

While acknowledging that the war against the vallorn was a spiritual one she made it clear that she expected the opportunity to be abandoned in favour of other battle sites.

When the winter came the western forest of Liathaven subsided into quiescence. Its recent attempt at expansion had depleted its strength - and the Winter magic that now smothered the territory made it more difficult for it to replenish that strength. The vates still spoke of the opportunity to strike against the vallorn in Westwood, potentially driving it out and leaving it in possession only of Liath's Heart. The vallorn is a thing of unfettered fecundity however, and that window of opportunity was closing. By the start of the Summer Solstice 383YE the energies of the vallorn would have once again become strong enough to resist attempts to clear them with martial force and the opportunity to do was unlikely to come again any time soon.

Fortunately, the Empire controlled a beachhead in Liathaven - if they had not secured West Ranging from the Jotun, who had moved into the territory not long after the armies retreated, the challenge of fighting the vallorn would have been dramatically more difficult. Even so claiming the Westwood from its clutches would require significant effort. They would need to claim the *entire* region of Westwood before the start of the Summer Solstice. If even a tenth of the region was still controlled by the vallorn when the Solstice dawned it would slowly expand back to its full strength.

Llofir offered its aid against the vallorn in Broceliande and welcomed its heralds home with the intention of offering better help in regards to the vallorn threat generally. Unfortunately, the aid of Llofir was roundly rejected by the Imperial Conclave – in fact the eternal is now under enmity.

Owing to the mistrust surrounding Llofir and there was talk of the citizens who allowed its heralds on the trods being called to inquisition. Despite several prominent citizens being involved only Sian Eternal was called to defend her actions. The results are recorded in Judgement 74 of that summit.

“After inquisition Sian the advisor for Vallorn affairs was found to have acted with due vigilance and wisdom dealing with Llofir”

Raised by Vindictus in the General Assembly and upheld (681-10)

Early in the new year of 383YE Ossium was finally conquered. Its custodianship went to Varushka after a good deal of debate over who should have dominion over the territory. Despite the expansion of the Empire no nation was eager to call the territory their own.

It wasn't until the summer that victorious Imperial forces finally won a decisive victory over the vallorn of Liathaven. They ousted it from West Wood and claimed not only the region but also an unlooked for treasure - a pristine weirwood forest ripe for development. During the summit of the Summer Solstice a Senate motion was raised to commission a new Bourse seat in Liathaven; the motion was later withdrawn.

The Empire had conquered West Wood. Along with West Ranging, which meant they now controlled two regions in the territory. The Jotun control four regions (and the territory), and the vallorn controls Liath's Heart.

Now that the Liathaven vallorn is down to one region it is *stronger* than before. Its entire power focused in one place, experience of the war to reclaim Miaren shows that it is more dangerous now than ever before.

For the first time since the fall of Terunael it is possible to walk from Western Scout to West Ranging.

The victory was not without cost. One price that was paid was that the magical wonder that was the The Paths of Lan Thúven is no more. With the vallorn gone, the Night magic that empowered the paths likewise faded and unravelled.

It was a long year and a half for the Navarr, they fought not only physically but politically to ensure that they could all fulfil their oaths. At times it seemed the Empire was asking them to set aside one of their strongest hearth magics, the tattoo all Navarri share – the Binding of Thorns. The victory of the vallorn came just in time but it was a close-run thing. Had the opportunity been taken advantage of sooner then the armies would not have had to push against the Jotun in addition to the vallorn and the meddling of the Heirs of Terunael.

Again, a large cost has been paid by the people of Navarr. Their lost territory is scarred by supernatural fire, the land is blighted by Winter and sites of cultural significance are in the hands of the Jotun. More than that they remain the only nation since the interregnum to have not liberated a territory that was once theirs despite the barbarians retreating completely for a time. Without security or defence, the Weirwood forest the Empire chose not to cultivate could also easily fall into enemy hands.



The homes of Liathaven stand abandoned & pillaged

The reclaiming of the region is rightly celebrated by Navarr and the Empire as a whole, it is a distinct victory that has opened more routes of travel across the Empire and more importantly freed trapped souls held within the vallorn of West Ranging and Westwood. But it would be remiss to not ask, could more have been done?

ABOUT THE ADVISOR ON THE VALLORN

The Advisor on the Vallorn is an Imperial title that was established by majority vote of the Senate in Spring 378YE. It was created in response to the fact very little was known about the Vallorn, especially by citizens who weren't Navarri. Risks were taken and lives were lost because the enemy was often underestimated or just misunderstood.

The motion proposing the position read:

Create the title Advisor on the Valorn, to be nominated by a unanimous decision of Navarr senators, falling back to a greater majority of the senate. To have the powers: Right of Address to the Senate, right to request one item of research each summit (at standard costs) and the right to raise one free motion of Interdiction in the Conclave per summit. To receive a Stipend of 2 crowns.

Proposed by Kahraman, seconded by Redoubt.

While approved in principle the Senate chose not to provide the Advisor with a stipend.

The Advisor is responsible for advising the Senate on matters relating to the vallorn, and protecting the Empire from the influence of this mysterious force or entity. To do this they are granted the Right of Address to make announcements to the Senate and the ability to raise a Declaration of Interdiction in Conclave without expending crystal mana.

Since the title's creation it has been held by three Navarri vates.

MEREL PATHFINDER

The Innovator

Following the fall of Empress Britta the skilled vate and artisan Merel Pathfinder was very vocal in the need for an advisor to the Empire when it came to the Vallorn. It was because of his proactive nature it was only natural he be the first appointed to the position. He served for just under a year, in which he strove to dispel the biggest misconceptions about the vallorn and also increase awareness of the title and its responsibilities.



It was during his tenure that one of the surviving ritual texts of The Dance of Navarr was brought to Anvil and entrusted to his care. With the assistance of Siân Eternal (Associate Dean of the Lyceum at the time) he ensured that the text was added to Imperial lore so that it could be more widely learned by the vates of Navarr and not become lost again.

Merel always strives to leave a lasting positive legacy in the Empire. Prior to his heavy involvement in the creation of this title he created the first documented artifact after the death of Emperess Britta. ‘Merel’s Rod of Healing’ the artifact Ambergelt Baton he crafted has become a part of the Empire’s Warmage’s regalia. The warmage may wield the rod themselves, but Merel’s original intention was that it could be allocated to a worthy individual each day to ensure it saved the most lives possible.

Known by many as ‘Mad Merel’ if he forms a plan he believes will help people he will chase it doggedly. Many of his ideas are unorthodox but he does all he can to make them viable. On example of this is the creation of the Dredging operations in the Feverwater. In the wake of an empty throne the ability to commission many new buildings and endeavours were lost. There was no ability to commission sinecures as we do today yet Merel chose to chase his idea to hunt the dangerous Feverwater for resources and perhaps items of historical import.

While the dredging only salvages a few measures of materials each season it has on occasion provided items of historical interest including the Gwerin

Morfa fragment printed earlier in this book. It could also be argued that it paved the way for future commissions such as sinecures and follis.

Merel now serves as the Granger of the Golden Orchard, a mana sinecure in Miaren but still works on a variety of endeavours to help Navarr and the Empire as a whole. While he has no intention of taking the title of Advisor on the Vallorn again in the foreseeable future he still works closely with the Advisor offering aid where he can.

Most recently he was instrumental in securing valuable information from the Thule, including the ritual text for the Arc of Skuld.

NEB FIRSTDANCE

The Envoy

When Merel had to leave the position due to personal circumstance he made the recommendation to the Navarri senators that Neb Firstdance become his successor and that Siân Eternal work closely with him to aid in research. Honouring this request Neb became the second Advisor on the Vallorn in the Winter of 378YE and quickly made his voice heard.



Following and expanding on the groundwork laid down by his predecessor he vocally increased the awareness of the Vallorn and the threat it posed across all nations. He was known for his passionate and characterful speeches both in Senate and to any who sought his advice but also his forceful corrections to any who would spread misinformation about the nature of Spring magic.

He also spearheaded the initial historical research into the Vallorn. The research was sponsored by prosperity and curiosity of The Academy and while it was at the time that troubles began with The Whisper Gallery attacking Historical Researchers the important document that served as the springboard for many future investigations was secured. Despite the Whisper Gallery placing a price on his head he pushed for research to continue and fervently supported the motion to get protection for the historical researchers.

As well as discussions with the people of the Empire Neb also entered negotiations with the Druj Ghulai known as Greenmask in regards to the trods and the Vallorn as a whole. It was through his initial talks and the ingenuity of the vates of Navarr and the Imperial Orcs that ritual knowledge was wrested from Greenmask's mind and the Imperial heroes ended the Ghulai's life.

In his year and a half in the role Neb left a lasting legacy in the form of his book on the Vallorn and the 'Notes of The Vallorn' which he published every season of his tenure. These notes have been entered into Imperial records and can be accessed in most places of learning.

Impulsive to the end Neb formed a theory on the Vallorn and was last seen heading into Broceliande to do further practical research.

SIÂN ETERNAL

The Lorekeeper

Before his disappearance Neb sent a letter to Siân Eternal, with whom he'd worked closely with throughout his tenure, asking her to act as his proxy in Anvil but also stating he was unsure when and if he would return. In the uncertainty over Neb's fate the Senators of Navarr asked Siân to officially take the position. With some reluctance she agreed under the proviso that it be 'until a better candidate was found'.

It was during the Spring Equinox of 380YE that the often reserved merrow began her tenure in the role. While her predecessors were very vocal and direct in their approaches, she took a different approach. Over sweeping announcements she favoured quieter more in depth discussion. She advised Generals, Senators, and any curious citizen directly ensuring that all their questions were answered to the best of her ability.

Already an academic Siân previously worked as the Associate Dean of the Lyceum alongside both Simargl, The Empty One and Eudaemon of Halcyon. Already accustomed to working with the Civil Service in regards to research she made ample use of her ability to commission Historical Research. She also used this ability to work with the Ambassador to Axos, Tarquinius of Ankarien, to sponsor an expedition into Axos itself and the Vallorn there.

Keen to ensure that knowledge not be lost again and that as many people as possible be educated in not only the Vallorn itself but also the history of Navarr and Terunael she oversaw the construction of the Great Library of Hacynian. Initially a site of a Terunael library that survived the fall (only to fall to later ruin) the Great Library stands upon a regio of Day and Night magic within Mourning Hollow. Both Phaleron and Sung hold interest in the site but despite requests from both Eternals to be allowed some dominion over the regio in the end it was devoted entirely to the Empire and its custodianship granted to the Advisor on the Vallorn.



As well as Historical Research and Expeditions Siân also followed other paths to unearth as much information as she could on the Vallorn itself but also the circumstances of its creation and what has been done in the past to try to contain and eradicate the threat. As well as documenting results of various divination rituals and speaking to people with firsthand knowledge of the threat she secured a favour from the Celestial Library, Phaleron. After some discussion with the people of Navarr she eventually secured a biography on the life of Navarr written in the early days of the Empire in exchange for her favour.

It was during her tenure that both Navarr and Thorn were recognised as exemplars of Wisdom and Ambition respectively. While the majority of the work on these recognitions was done by Erasmo di Tassato, Madog and Elowen of Exile's End sporting evidence and advice was provided by Siân.

Trough research and discovery further investigation into the relationship between vallornspawn and the soul was endorsed. It was during this investigation that Raewyn Eternal was able to insight a husk and see a soul trapped within. Knowledge of this discovery was spread through the Empire through Raewyn's words in the Synod. The priests of Highguard took this information and sought to do all they could to help these trapped souls and the Grey Pilgrims were formed. Understanding the weight of the number of trapped souls the other nations worked hard to support Highguard through their period of transition as their pilgrims took to the trods.

While mostly a quiet voice of authority Siân occasionally surprised people by being very vocal and blunt on some topics. The most notable being the approach to be taken in regards to the opportunity to push back the Vallorn in Liathaven. She spoke pointedly in front of a Standing in Anvil, especially towards Empress Lisabetta and Imperial Inquisitor at the time Corwyn Leafstalker when the removal of Brennos Brackensong's army was played off as a small spat between the General and the Throne. She was swift to point out that it wasn't a small indiscretion it was a move to halt Quiet Step so they could not strike against the Vallorn.

THE PROBLEM WITH ONGOING RESEARCH

It is hard to compile a book on a topic that is still being researched. We are constantly striving to gain more knowledge on the phenomenon that is the Vallorn, how it came to be and how it can be ended. It has been less than two years since I first completed the first iteration of this book, while those early issues did not include copies of all the supporting research documents I did my utmost to present the facts as they were known at the time. The beginning of this book has received a few small edits over time to reflect more information coming to light and I have no doubts that future issues will evolve further.

I questioned when the correct time to publish a ‘Researchers Edition’ might be given that there will always be outstanding research to be added but now felt like the right time. In the wake of our better understanding of vallornspawn husks, seeing how Yaw’nagrah has influenced the situation and the push back of the vallorn in Liathaven it feels that now more than ever people need to be fully aware of the scope of the vile threat to the Empire that is the vallorn.

That said for the sake of being as complete as possible I am dedicating the next pages to research that is currently underway and some of the possibilities for other routes of enquiry. I will also be including some additional blank pages at the back of the book should you wish to make notes or affix copies of newer research.

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH

FROM AXOS

During diplomatic talks with an Ambassador from Axos it was agreed that while the Dance of Navarr and Thorn is a very effective tool against the Vallorn it would serve no purpose in Axos without the Navarr to walk the trods. However, they saw the potential in the ritual and asked if they could study it in



*Tarquinius of Ankarien,
Ambassador to Axos*

the hopes of creating something similar that may work for them. Following some negotiations and talks amongst the vates of Navarr it was agreed that the spire be allowed a copy of the ritual text on the grounds that in exchange they were to provide copies of any ritual(s) they developed to combat the vallorn that were born of their research.

Unfortunately, the researchers of Kantor spire were unable to develop anything new from the exchange and provided the vates of Navarr with a little white granite in recompense. While this exchange yielded little of use it helped solidify a relationship of mutual respect between the spire and the people of Navarr. Perhaps in the future we will be able to work together again in attempting to find solutions for dealing with the vallorn threat.

In the time since these negotiations the spy network in the Mountains of the Moon was commissioned and used. While we are now aware of a possible land route to Axos that could mean extending the trod network to them it would require the blessing, or at least the understanding of the people of Tsark to allow for the Navarr and Grey Pilgrims to traverse their lands.

Another potential route for trods to take to Axos would be through the Mallum, linking not only the Cavan Vallorn heart but also that of Béantol Dol to the network – this could potentially be achieved through a shared offensive by the Empire and Axos into Druj lands.

FROM THE PEOPLE OUR SPY NETWORK

Following the summit on the Winter Solstice of 383YE military units were dispatched to make use of the spy network in Liathaven. It is believed that in doing so more information on the Heirs of Terunael and their workings may be uncovered.

FROM THE PEOPLE OF NAVARR

Following on from the Historical Research Request into Abraxus Stones and the support of the Navarr Assembly the virtuous citizens of Navarr have been asked to come forward if they have any information on The Vate's Shelter that was worn by Roswen Doublestep. While we have been unable to secure one lead on the artifact, we will continue to do our utmost to find out more about artifacts used in fighting the Vallorn.



It is through stories of our heroes and the tools they used to combat the Vallorn that we will be able to form increasingly effective methods of dealing with the threat.

FROM THE ARTISANS OF TREJI

Further to the above there are stories of Star, the compatriot of Navarr and Thorn, that have yet to be widely shared. The people who are likely most knowledgeable of these tales are the now freed Artisans of Treji, in particular Eirwen Stones Rest. They were recently contacted by Winged Messenger and have been invited to send a message in response or to attend Anvil at a future summit.

AVENUES FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

There are many paths we can take in learning more about Terunael and the Vallorn and this list is by no means exhaustive, I include this list here to share what I intend to research in the near future. If you wish to undertake any of these avenues of investigation, please be sure to collaborate with myself and future Advisors on the Vallorn to ensure resources aren't being squandered by multiple groups following the same leads.

TOPICS FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Emnity against Sadogua.

Further to Cybi Farkas' account on discussing it with Leviathan it is possible that historical research may uncover more of the facts surrounding the Declaration of Emnity against Sadogua during the first century of the Empire. If any accounts of discussions within Conclave at that time could be unearthed then we would have a potentially clearer view of the eternal's role in the fall of Terunael.

Terunael Sites

There are several sites of Terunael origin that little is known about that could be investigated further. Prime examples of this are The Paths of Lan Thúven, The Gate of Summer and Boar's Hollow.

Other Sites of Interest

Other locations within the Empire that are worth consideration when it comes to research are the Pool of Silver Clouds, the Earthworks of Liaven's Glen (though arguably this would have been easier to do when they were not under the control of the Jotun) and any information on Turning Spiral Library and the final fates of the researchers there.

Historical Figures

In the Historical Treaties compiled by Morfran Ravenswatch in 172YE other historical figures are mentioned that could be researched One is Pyre Blackroot whose diaries spoke of the life of Navarr including tales of his grandmother, Niyril of Hercyniand who took on the name Nightshade when she became an

early member of the nation of Navarr. Another is General Brawdwr Gryphonstand and his army the Bronze Gryphon, it is said that the General met Navarr herself. Finally, the ancient Firstdance striding, especially their early history and the lives of Ffion and Enthis (and her partner Prys)

MORE INFORMATION ON ABRAXUS STONES

Following the historical research into Abraxus Stones there are still two routes of further investigation that could be explored. Firstly, the material components used in the creation of the Sarcophan variant of the talisman. This information could be potentially procured through diplomatic relations with the Sarcophan Delves.

Secondly, the talisman known as the Swan's Chalice. Discussions with the Ylenrith could yield more information on the eternal's involvement in not only that particular Abraxus Stone but the nature of the talismans in general.

QUESTIONS FOR LEVIATHAN

The ritual Swim Leviathan's Depths is a very valuable resource in discovering information about the past, however the questions asked during the casting should be kept very precise and in accordance with the wording of the ritual itself. Some potential questions to ask include:

"Why did the Terun unravel the trods?"

It is probable that the people of Terunael saw what they had created with their great ritual and worried that by keeping the Vallorn hearts connected that they were worsening the situation. However there have been more to their decision and the initial relationship between the trods and the Vallorn.

"Why did Emperor Nicovar purge the Terun descendants in Axos?"

We know that Emperor Nicovar was exacting in his destruction of information, what isn't clear however is why he went to the effort to eradicate the Terun descendants of Axos. It would have taken significant effort to not only find them but to dispatch troops that far to deal with them.

"Why are the people of Tsark so secretive?"

There is a lot that we do not know about the Mountains of the Moon and the people of Tsark that perhaps could be learned through diplomatic effort. It may prove difficult due to their insular nature however. I cannot help but wonder what caused them to be closed off. This is of particular interest to me as the trail of Terunael refugees from Kaban leads through Axos and into the Mountains.

THE ASSISTANCE OF OTHER ETERNALS

Beyond the use of Swim Leviathan's Depths and speaking with Ylenrith about Abraxus Stones there are other eternal's we could seek information from.

Llofir

While the Empire turned its back on Llofir's offers of aid in favour of fighting the eternal's presence in Reikos the eternal voiced its understanding that it cannot be both an ally and an enemy at the same time it could be one and then the other.

With some effort we could work to secure the information Llofir obtained while its heralds walked the trods and can discuss ways in which the eternal could aid us going forward.

Kaela

Having voiced her dislike of the Vallorn it is possible that we could seek aid and advice from the eternal on how to end the Vallorn for good.

Phaleron

It is very difficult, but not impossible, to obtain documents from The Celestial Library and it is possible it has more books that are relevant to Terunael and the Vallorn.

Roshanwe

The eternal of discovery can be contacted through the Combing the Beach ritual and can provide insights and other possible avenues of research on a topic. However, the ritual only allows for 250 words to encompass what you already know so a good deal of thought would need to be put into the wording of the request.

Ossegrahn

In recent a recent audience with the previously quiet eternal Lord Rain voiced its dislike of the Vallorn and its desire to help the Empire. While there are some reservations about its true intent the mages of the Empire are vigilantly doing their utmost to learn more about its history and motives. Perhaps in the future this eternal could assist us.

DIPLOMATIC OPTIONS

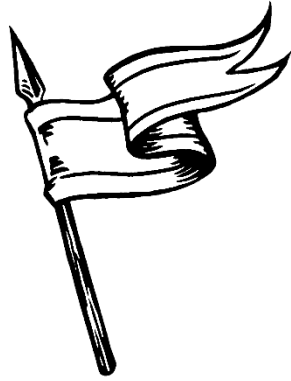
Terunael spread into lands beyond ours and as such there is information on the Vallorn and Terun civilisation outside our lands that could be procured through diplomatic effort.

Axos

We have already received a good deal of information through our dealings with the Axou. If these positive interactions continue then we should be able to share information with increased trust and freedom.

The Thule

An arguably more difficult route to undertake however we have already secured some information from The Thule in the form of the ritual text of the Arc of Skuld. The ritual details not only the people of Terunael and their actions but also what happened when a star fell upon the Vallorn. Should diplomatic relations continue on a good footing we could potentially learn more from the Dragons.





Advisor's Notes: In Closing

It was early in my tenure as Advisor on the Vallorn that I found myself meeting with the eternal Kaela. It was during that audience that we spoke on endings and I voiced my ambition. I sought not only to lead the Empire in fighting the Vallorn but to strive to see another Vallorn heart defeated in my lifetime. Amused, Kaela offered me a place in her legion to ensure my longevity and ensure that my words become reality. Naturally I declined but stating my intent in front a figure of such power was very reaffirming. My oaths stand resolute and have been at the forefront of my mind while writing this book.

It is strange to think that I have collated and written so many pages on a singular topic and yet it still feels like nowhere near enough. However, I am hopeful that the information contained in this book is of use to you. Whether it is to be prepared and more aware of the situation for the battles ahead or to use existing information to inform your research I am sure there is a lot to be gained from these documents. It is my intent to work to see that all of this information is as widespread as possible in particular through libraries of the Empire and the Civil Service. It is only through sharing our knowledge of the past that we ensure we do not make similar mistakes again.



Thank you for working with me, by reading this book and endeavouring to understand the nature of the vallorn better we are all working together towards the eventual eradication of the vile threat. If you have any questions or ideas for further research and dissemination of information do not hesitate to let me know. Let's all work together to ensure a better Empire for future generations.

Siân Eternal

NOTES

Please use these pages to make your own notes, addendums or affix new research documents.

