

# THE BARRENS SPY NETWORK

This season, Imperial forces have committed a total strength of one-thousand three hundred and eighty to the spy network in the Barrens. This is sufficient to gain an overview of the territory, and to secure details of military forces present, but it is not enough to draw a (new) map, or determine precise details of fortifications and bourse resources.

## The Invasion of Dawnguard

As described elsewhere, the Druj barbarians have invaded and conquered Dawnguard. Five armies of Druj - their entire current force in the Barrens - launched a surprise attack aimed at capturing the region as quickly as possible.

Uncharacteristically the Druj armies did not prioritize casualties - rather they went all-out to conquer Dawnguard. It seems that the Druj were expecting much heavier resistance than they in fact encountered - given the number of warriors committed and the overwhelming nature of their offensive. Interrogation of captured Druj suggests that the original plan was to capture the Towers of the Dawn, rather than destroy them - but the Druj had misjudged their state of repair and miscalculated the force of their attack. The subsequent torture and murder of the remaining garrison soldiers speaks of a vicious frustration on behalf of the orc leadership.

The five armies currently in the Barrens all participated in the attack. The *Deadly Blade*, the *Hidden Widow*, the *Hunting Scorpion*, and the *Poison Crane* focused their attention on the Towers of the Dawn. The fifth army, the *Jagged Claws*, rounded up Dawnish civilians and oversaw the occupation of Drycastle.

Some of these armies are familiar from previous campaigns, but following their defeats by the Empire the Druj seem to have invested time and energy in significantly strengthening their forces. Their warriors fight with grim fervor, a confidence not much in evidence in the Holberg campaign - although the viciousness with which they treat their opponents is all too familiar. Many Druj observed by Imperial scouts have good quality, if brutally unattractive, war gear. They are quick to raid captured estates and turn the weapons and armour of Dawn against the Empire.

## The situation in the conquered region

The overwhelming assault of the Druj caught many Dawnish residents of Dawnguard by surprise. A combination of vigilant preparation and courageous sacrifices by nobles and yeomen alike allowed at least some of the people to escape north to Semmerholm, east to Holberg, or even west to Boar's Dell in Brocéliande. The majority, however, have been captured by the Druj.

Any resistance is brutally suppressed. Worse, for every Druj killed by Imperial resistance fighters, a dozen yeofolk are condemned to a slow agonising death. Their tormented bodies are impaled on stakes in the fields outside Drycastle, and attempting to remove the dead for burial is itself a capital offense.

It is estimated that there are between ten and fifteen thousand civilians remaining in Dawnguard. They are spread out around the territory, but a significant number of noncombatants (including many children) have been brought to Drycastle under the guard of the Jagged Claws - which the Druj have made their base of operations in the area.

Able bodied Dawnish have been pressed into a few work gangs to clear collapsed buildings, tend to farms, or otherwise exploit captured resources, but so far there is no sign of the ghastly labour camps employed by the Stone Toad in Reikos. Indeed, with the exception of the reprisals from resistance efforts, the Druj have not gone out of their way to slaughter or torment the people of Dawnguard, being more interested in containing them and consolidating their hold on the region. How long this state of affairs will last is difficult to say.

One other odd observation has some of the scouts worried - some twenty Dawnish nobles are so far utterly unaccounted for. Normally this could be put down to the confusion of the invasion but in each case these nobles were last seen actively resisting the Druj. Normally, the orcs would have brutally tortured them to death and mounted their heads on poles as a warning to others ... but in this case they seem to have simply disappeared. Members of every significant Dawnguard house are listed among the missing. There are scattered reports that some of the forces, especially those of the Jagged Claws, are going out of their way to capture noble resistance fighters alive.

## The Druj armies

The *Deadly Blade* fight beneath banners showing a serpent coiled around a wavy-bladed dagger or sword, under the command of a grim orc referred to as *Warlord Bitterfang*. The Warlord, like many of the warriors who follow them, fights with two vicious envenomed blades. The Deadly Blade are part of the main body of orc troops attacking Dawnguard, but they are not entirely comfortable with the direct assault employed against the Towers of the Dawn. They clearly prefer a more stealthy, vicious approach - during a normal campaign they are likely to employ both underhand tactics and venom to quickly overpower opponents. After the fall of Dawnguard, their fighting strength is still estimated to be around five thousand. (OOO Note: The Deadly Blade have the Assassin/Venomous Quality)

The *Hidden Widow* fight beneath banners depicting spiders, although some of their number bear standards which appear at first sight to be solid fields of green or yellow fabric with no obvious design. They are led by *Warlord Webspinner*. As with the Deadly Blade, they are clearly adept at stealthy and vicious combat, and appear to enjoy

laying simple, brutal traps designed to entrap and slaughter unwary opponents. As with the Deadly Blade, their fighting strength is estimated to be around five thousand. (OOO Note: The Hidden Widow have the Treacherous/Venomous Quality)

The **Hunting Scorpion** are a massive host of orcs, fighting beneath banners that (unsurprisingly) bear the mark of stylised scorpions. Under the leadership of *Warlord Withersting*, they lead the assault against the Towers of the Dawn. Their ranks contain a disproportionate number of *hupul* – light skirmishers. While there is only little evidence of it in the battle for the Towers, they appear to be adept at complex maneuvers, especially taking advantage of opportunities to flank and splinter the ranks of defensive opponents. After the fall of the Towers of the Dawn, their strength is estimated in the mid-to-low seven thousands. (OOO Note: The Hunting Scorpion have the Manoeuvrable/Skirmishing Quality).

The **Poison Crane** fight beneath banners showing some sort of marsh bird - although the creature depicted has a significantly more martial aspect than the storks the Empire is familiar with. Navarr scouts working with the spy network theorise that they may depict a breed of dire beast, perhaps a marsh dwelling cousin of the terror birds that once lived in parts of the Brass Coast. They are lead by *Warlord Redtalon*. They evidence particularly savage tactics in battle - launching bloodthirsty, sustained attacks against the Dawnish defenders. While their main focus is on capturing the Towers of the Dawn, they also lead the assault against Drycastle, ruthlessly attacking the defenders. Of all the armies active in the Barrens, they seem to be both the most disciplined, and the best equipped. Their fighting strength is estimated to be around five thousand. (OOO Note: The Poison Crane have the Savage/Relentless Quality).

Finally, the **Jagged Claws** also fight beneath scorpion banners, but in their case the pincers are greatly exaggerated and the beasts are often depicted as if armoured. There is an above-average number of *chikad* among their forces. They march under the orders of *Warlord Bloodmaw* and many of them paint their faces and helmets to echo the monstrous mask worn by their leader. Unlike the other four armies, they do not engage in an overwhelming assault against Dawnguard, but instead fight defensively even as they attack - consolidating Druj gains in the region before moving on. They crush all resistance before moving forward. They are currently camped in and around Drycastle. Their fighting strength is estimated to be around five thousand. (OOO Note: The Jagged Claws have the Cautious/Resilient Quality).

### Fortifications of the Barrens

The attention of the Imperial scouts is, perhaps understandably, focused on Dawnguard. Some press deeper into the Barrens, however. These scouts do not find any evidence of significant castles in the territory, beyond magical fortifications raised in Saltmarsh and the Bleaks by Druj *ghulai*.

They confirm that the *Towers of the Dusk* are in ruins. Some brave Dawnish scouts prepared to push deep into the eastern Barrens report that the Druj have slave gangs at work rebuilding the fortification, however. They were not able to get close enough to determine how close to completion the construction is.

Scouts also report that *Dourfell Keep* - the fortified human settlement in Hope's Rest - is no more. Where it once stood there are now only charred fields, ruined walls, and a shallow lake that was *not* there during previous observation. Highborn unconquered report that the destruction was not wholly natural - that the castle was destroyed by magic. Of the briars who lived there, there is no sign. With the Druj tendency to put the bodies of those who resist them on spikes, it seems odd that there is no evidence of this having happened at Hope's Rest.

### Elsewhere in the Barrens

For the most part, the Barrens is much as scouts have previously reported. The population is much reduced. There are almost no indigenous orcs left in Murderdale or the Carmine Fields. The Edge of Peytaht is mostly abandoned (although the Druj have put obvious orc slaves to work harvesting the groves at the Eaves of Peytaht). Most of the remaining population seems to be focused in the east around the Bitter Strand, Saltmarsh, and the Plains of Teeth - a combination of surviving orc tribes collaborating with the Druj to various degrees, enslaved orcs, and Druj conquerers.

The Druj appear focused on conquest rather than settlement, but this has not stopped them exploiting the Barrens' rich resources. Mithril from the Fangs and weirwood from the Eaves of Peytaht are being transported out of the Barrens into the eastern Mallum. Imperial orc scouts report that a portion of the mithril is being stockpiled in Saltmarsh, presumably to be used for resupplying the barbarian armies - but *all* the weirwood is being exported.

### Game Information

You are welcome to use this information as you see fit – but this document is out-of-character and should not be shown to other characters during the event. Instead please use it as the basis of your roleplaying regarding the events described.

Where the Army Quality of a Druj army is noted, the first word describes their quality in narrative terms, while the second describes the equivalent quality as it appears on the wiki. So the Hidden Widows are “treacherous” (making use of traps and ambushes, as well as poisoned and venomous weapons), which allows them to take an order equivalent to *Fire in the Blood*.

