

Harvest of infamy

A Wind from the West

As seasons turn, three great battleships speed through the Kongegór. On the wings of unseasonably strong winds from the west, they sweep down the Gullet and into the newly dredged Westmere. Some of those trading with Caitun, guarding the Westerhal fisherfolk or scouting the Kalsea coast mark their passage, but with little time to raise an effective warning. Those who are unfortunate enough to attract the attention of the flotilla are callously destroyed, vessels smashed, crew left to the cruel embrace of merciless waters chill even at the height of Summer.

These massive Asavean warships are on their way to destroy the city of Meade! Two of them are known to the Marchers thanks to their murderous endeavours along the Brass Coast – Leaping Bull and Wind Tamer. The third vessel has not been seen before in Imperial waters - Venger's Blade. The three battleships are daunting enough, but they are also accompanied by a dozen fast ships of Asavean make, a panoply of sails and flags and ribbons marking them as independent captains from the western Archipelago. There are also perhaps as many as another dozen Grendel ships in the flotilla, eager to root through whatever ruin the Asaveans leave in their wake.

Iacq Indurain,

Agents in the court of the Five Winds have discovered the existence of undefended Imperial ports in the north-west of their dominion. Take your vessels with all speed and rendezvous with the others at the port of Caitun on the frigid Sea of Snows; seek passage through the Kongegór. By all accounts the rocks here are dangerous, but trust Balo to guide you. Avoid all contact with the orcs here; they are hostile and will provide no support. Our intelligence indicates that they possess no ships of any account but there is no value in

antagonising them at this time.

Once past the rocks, an inner sea coarsely named "the Gullet". Follow the southern coast. At the mouth of the gullet is a river that leads to the unimaginatively named "Westmere". Our sources indicate that the previously un-navigable waters here have recently been deepened. There are Imperial settlements on either side of the Westmere, but they are small and inconsequential. Ignore them. Your prize, a large town called "Meade".

The Red Goddess is with us. The nearest fortification seems to be at the opposite end of the territory. There will be a local garrison, and the people of the Marcher satrapy are notoriously violent and stubborn. Surprise is our ally; they will be as helpless in the face of a swift and brutal raid as the sailors of Shantarim. Sack their town, take whatever wealth you wish, slaughter anyone you can, and make a pyre of their town in offering to the Twin Gods.

Asavean Orders

Their intent is clear. They are not here to invade Mitwold; dangerous as the force is it would struggle to conquer Marcher land much less hold it. They are marines, not soldiers. Privateers, not warriors. Their target is the great market-city of Meade, the Pride of the Marches. To do to it what they and their Grendel allies did to Madruga.

Pride of the Marches

Meade proudly stands at the mouth of the eponymous river, on the shores of the Westmere. It has sturdy walls, reinforced a decade ago, but they are built to keep disgruntled bandits and Jotun raiders at bay, not to defend against a massed attack from the sea.

As the fleet approaches, flying on the wings of a vengeful wind, bells begin to ring. All across the city, they cry out a warning to the inhabitants of the first market-town. Some flee, crushing through the gates into Meade March, following the river-road to Wayford. Many more grab weapons, or fire buckets, or surgeon's tools, and rise to meet the Asavean assault. There is no doubt that they will fight, and

equally little likelihood that they will succeed any more than the defenders of poor ruined Siroc – and the Freeborn had a grand fortification to protect them. Forte Fidelis is a long way away, it's garrison keeping a nervous eye on the border with Jotun-invaded Mournwold. They will not arrive in time to make a difference.

As Venger's Blade slows and stands off the harbour, readying catapults and ballistae, Leaping Bull smashes into the harbour. Its iron-bound ram in the shape of a great horned beast rip through the wooden quays, tear the Marcher ships at anchor in the Westmere, and disgorge a hundred armed-and-armoured mercenary-marines onto the dockside. Close behind them are some forty Asavean and Grendel ships eager to help themselves to the wealth of Meade, to slaughter the defenders, to burn the town. Wind Tamer, however, stays at a distance, the massive warship acting much more cautiously than the other two, than the privateering fleets that sail in their shadow.

And as the raiders boil onto the docks of Meade, the trap is sprung.

The Poacher's Lament

During the Summer Solstice, Imperial heroes passed through the Sentinel Gate to fight the Grendel in far-away Madruga. Among other victories they slew Iacq Indurain, a high ranking Asavean liaison with the late and unlamented Rahab, former Governor of Feroz. Orders were seized from the dead Asavean captain, detailing their wicked plan. The Drakes immediately marched north from Madruga, through Tassato and Upwold, racing the swift Asavean warships, to reach Meade before them. It was a close-run thing, but Old Tom's pride and joy is there to show the treacherous raiders that Mitwold will never be undefended as long as one soldier of the Drakes draws breath. Nearly four thousand warriors of independent warbands meet them there. Mostly, but not exclusively, Marchers they come to Meade in its hour of need. They are joined by roughly half the garrison of Forte Fidelis, all that can be spared with the threat of invasion from the south, motivated by the warning of the Marcher assembly in the dying hours of the Summer Solstice

summit.

Drakes! We have been fighting hard, I wish I could give you the rest you deserve. But, a threat has arisen in Mitwold. We will mount a Solid Defence of Meade! Soldiers to the Walls!

Tancred of Meade, General of the Drakes

Hue and cry, hue and cry. Marchers hear my words. We believe the forces of Asavea seek the heart of Mitwold. They will come to sack and raze your homes in Meade. It is time again for your vigilance. Look after your neighbours. Look out for your kin. Flee if you must. But trust the Drakes are coming home..

*Jonathon Piper, Marches Assembly, Summer Solstice 386YE,
(Greater Majority 194-0)*

The Asaveans and their Grendel allies are taken by surprise. They expected easy pickings – a day of rapacious plunder and bloodshed and then fire the thatch as their ships retreat creating a terrible beacon of violence and loss for the folk of the Marches. Everything goes wrong for them when the Drakes arrive, and the people of Meade rise up beneath their banner to show the Asaveans the mettle of the Marches.

The few siege engines mounted on the walls are already turned inward, aiming toward the harbour. The yeofolk are ready and willing to fight to lay down their lives if need be. The fisherfolk and merchants have already withdrawn many of their ships west to Steward's Landing and when the bells begin to ring some of them return attacking the invading force from the flank. The Marches has no strong tradition of maritime warfare, but they know how to win a fight; strike hard and lay your foe out, and don't give the bugger time to stand back up again.

The fighting on the docks is brutal and efficient; those attackers who do not fall to Marcher steel and green-fletched arrows are often as not driven into the welcoming embrace of the Westmere. Those enemy ships not swift enough to disengage are burned and broken, their decks awash with blood. The most vicious fighting takes place

on the docks around the Leaping Bull. Five-score heavily armed soldier-acolytes marked by the Black Bull, strengthened with the power of Spring magic, and supported by half again as many desperate pirates and marines stand their ground fighting to delay the Imperial counterattack so that their warship can escape. They fall like wheat before Marcher scythes.

So swift are the Drakes that the captain of the Leaping Bull is unable to turn the ship; oars tangle and break in the desperate attempt to get away from the dock. To their horror, the Asaveans find that a plucky cadre of merrow have slipped beneath the waters of the lake and wrapped the oars of the great ship in fishing nets, secured the anchors with additional weight dredged out of the silt at the bottom of the lake. The battleship cannot escape, and the fighting spills out of Meade and onto its decks.

In the end, the captain scuttles their own vessel rather than let it fall into Imperial hands, dying to a Marcher bill even as they shout their final orders.

Venger's Blade is already moving, fleeing the town and the wreck of the Leaping Bull. Flaming arrows are launched from the walls overlooking the docks, and a great cheer goes up as one of the warship-sails catches. It is extinguished, and the ship is still able to escape the Westmere under oar, but it flees with its tail between its legs. The Wind Tamer is long gone – as soon as the trap was sprung the cowardly battleship withdrew entirely from the fight along with almost a third of the Asavean ships.

(In the aftermath of the attack, when the few prisoners are questioned, they admit that word had come at the last moment from Asavea. It spoke of a garbled warning from an Imperial traitor, but was dismissed as nonsense. Only the captain of the Wind Tamer gave it any credence, claiming that Balo themselves had come in a dream to deliver an unhelpfully non-specific warning. In the end they forged ahead, confident that their prey was undefended.)

After the Storm

There is absolutely no doubt in anyone's mind that if the Drakes had not been here, then Meade would have fallen. It would have met the same fate as Siroc – its markets looted, its people put to the swords, its centuries of history lost in a blazing pyre of Asavean hate and vengeance. The garrison at Forte Fidelis would have arrived to find ashes and charred bones, all that remained of the premier market-town of the Marches.

With the Asaveans defeated, a celebration sweeps through the town. No soldier of the Drakes need pay for ale or pies for a week or more, nor lack for a warm bed.

The victory has not come without price, however. Two Asavean battleships, and perhaps as many as forty privateers and pirate ships may have been defeated but they take their toll of the defenders of Mitwold. Nearly a hundred Marcher soldiers fell in battle to protect Meade, to turn the Asavean's blade aside, to send the message that their treacherous tactics would not, could not, succeed.

It's doubtful they will try this again; but if they do the people of the Marches will be waiting for them.

Honest as a poacher's tears

Marcher Proverb

Game Information : Meade

Meade has been protected against the Asavean attack, and while there has been some damage to the docks the industrious Marchers are already hard at work repairing them.

The Asavean battleship Leaping Bull was destroyed and Venger's Blade has been seriously damaged by the defenders lead by the Drakes. Before they were driven off, however, the attackers were able to inflict nearly a hundred casualties on the Imperial army.

None of the military units who supported the Drakes received shares of the Imperial Guerdon.