

# Where the river rises

*Jorge was a Jackal of the Red Wind Corsairs, had been for ten years now, and that meant that above all else he was a problem-solver. There was no situation that one could not turn to one's advantage with enough creative thinking. That was the guiding principle, the watchword of what it meant to be part of the elite cohort. They were trained for this. Well, he thought - perhaps we were not quite trained for this. He looked out in frustration at what had once been the Siroc Plains, and now certainly wasn't.*

*The job had been simple - stay behind in Madruga and advance scout the situation there, in the wake of the expected flooding, and send word to the general of the lay of the land and the disposition of Grendel forces in Madruga. Simple enough, especially when the Empire still held a comfortable beachhead in the territory. That had been the plan, and then the banks of the Scorrero had risen, grown fat with sudden rains in distant Kahrahman, and... he still wasn't quite sure what had happened next, because he'd been knocked off his feet by the suddenly rising waters and been separated from the rest of his troop, but when he'd woken up he'd been here, in the swampland. He could see, occasionally, the charred remains of the once-jewel of the Coast sticking forlornly out from between the reeds, and he could smell the sea and hear the calls of distant seabirds, so he was still in what had once been Siroc, but this was - this was something more than flooding. He was somewhere else, however much the place was also Siroc, and it gave him the shivering willies.*

*He looked over at his travelling companion. Niamh was a Grendel - from what little she'd said on the matter, her home was on distant Attar itself - but that hardly mattered much right*

*now, because she'd been separated from the rest of her own forces when the waters rose. After Jorge had found her upside down in the mud and pulled her out, they'd made a deal between the two of them to not fuck over each other until they'd found a way out of the endless mire. Jorge was a little worried that was treason, if you squinted, but he thought a magistrate would probably understand, if he ever saw one again. The bog was almost painful to navigate: it seemed to shift and shimmer, and every night when they made camp and went to sleep, they'd wake up with the strange mangrove trees in different positions, the paths shifted. Jorge was normally a dab hand at using flora and fauna to guide him, but the animals here had changed, too. He shivered at the thought of the deer he'd seen the day before. Too many teeth. Too many legs.*

*Niamh was decent company, at least, for a Grendel. At times he could almost forget that she'd come here on the wave of steel and salt that had burned down his home. Almost, but not entirely - but enough that he could laugh at her jokes, and her apparently boundless optimism, without it grating too much. "Come on, corsair!", she called behind. "I think I see a light over this ridge!" She ran on, and he followed behind. She reminded him a little of his daughter, who was serving with the Burning Falcon - the same irrepressible energy.*

*He came up the ridge, and saw that Niamh had stopped. There was a light, yes, a ball of iridescent fire burning at a crossroads in the fen. It burbled as they cautiously approached, now with weapons drawn. "Hello! Hello! I hope you are both well! Are you enjoying the Great Work?" Jorge and Niamh looked at each other in confusion. "The what?", Jorge said.*

*"The Great Work! It is all around you, is it not? Through the genius of the great alchemist Bakar i Riqueza, student of my master, this wounded land has been transformed in its pain.*

*North, of course, the transformation has been even more - well. You will see! I have been bid to rescue travellers from the swamplands. Many are lost here. The Rebis does not wish this! I am the Guiding Flame! I am the fire that knows the naming of you! Shall we find the strangling fruit of the marsh together, fenwalkers? Will you reveal the revelation of the fatal softness in the earth?" The voice lapsed suddenly into a recitation, talking to itself in a nonsense string of words which Jorge could make little sense of. He looked at Niamh, just as confused. He thought of his daughter. A Jackal made a profit in every situation, took every advantage, he thought - however strange. He stood forward.*

*"Flame! We will follow you!"*

*He could have sworn the shapeless fire began to smile.*

## **Overview**

For some time now, Madrugá has endured the strange phenomenon known as the Blight. What began as scattered rumours in the heart of the Great Grasses became a rapidly spreading blighted desert that spread in the wake of monstrous beings who stole the moisture from the very hearts of those they encountered. Despite the efforts of Imperial magicians to keep the blight at bay using potent Spring rains, eventually it claimed all of the Grasses and threatened to spill out across the entire Brass Coast. Thanks to the timely intervention of Imperial heroes - aided by a potent alchemical preparation made by the Hakima of Salt and Sand Bakar i Riqueza - the monstrous Dry Patricians were beaten back.

At the Summer Solstice, matters came to a head. While heroes fought the last remnants of the Dry Patricians forces, that same hakima journeyed deep into the Blight with a band of

brave comrades and destroyed the evil at its heart with the aid of the Azoth. The source of the Blight defeated, ritualists from every Freeborn tribe roused the power of Spring and, with some support from Lord Rain, broke the banks of the Scorrero river and cleansed the taint from the Great Grasses. This dramatic magic was not without price; the furious waters have flooded all the land along its course. The Scorrero is a fast-flowing and powerful river, whose waters are suffused with star metal. This made the effects of the ritual hard to predict, and across the Brass Coast, as Summer turns to Autumn, people wait anxiously for news of what this great magic has wrought.

## Rivers Rise

- The river Scorrero has burst its banks, causing extensive flooding along its course

Barely a week after the Summer Solstice, the Scorrero floods. The twin tributaries of the Scorrero rise in the mountains above Kahraman, and the flooding begins there. Foaming waters pour down from the heights, glutting the Scorrero and causing it to break its banks along its lengths. In Serra Damata, the floodwater runs down the hills, glittering in the sunlight of the dying summer. The operations of the Damatian Cliffs are not disrupted - they are set too deep and high for that - though for some days it is difficult for the workers to get in and out of the quarries to their workcamps and homes. There are inevitable rumours that the flooding has uncovered the legendary treasure known as Inacia's Trove, leading to an increase in desperate treasure hunters heading into the mountains to scour the banks of the river. Nothing comes of it, of course. Downstream, the waters thunder through arid Gambit and Burnish, glutting the moisture-hungry trees scattered across the dry plains. Riverside villages are flooded out, buildings ruined, farms that draw from

the tributaries are wrecked their irrigation ditches washed away in a wave of muddy water.

The brunt of the destructive power of the unbound river is felt in Segura, in the Sobral Grasses and Lucksprings. The two main bridges across the Scorrero, connecting the territory via the Sunset Roads to the rest of the Empire are broken into kindling. The Cerevado Nets are damaged, unsurprisingly, but the warning of the Freeborn assembly means operations can be suspended, the nets withdrawn in the weeks before the river rises. Cerevado itself is not so lucky; buildings along the waterfront are flattened or in some cases carried away by the flood. People die, or are seriously injured.

Feroz is broadly untouched, not least because there are so few Freeborn still living in the territory and those who remain are mostly inland, or along the coast. The main casualty is the bridge connecting Oranseri to the Siroc Plains; it means the same fate as the bridges further upstream.

As for Madrugá... no, we'll come to that in a moment.

## **Lamentable Loss of Life**

*Consequences are the price of ambition. To cleanse the blight from the Great Grasses requires bursting the banks of the Scorrero. Those living along its banks should be aware and prepare accordingly.*

*Martha I Guerra, Brass Coast Assembly, Summer Solstice 386YE, Upheld (Greater Majority 152-0)*

- Perhaps as many as six hundred people were killed, injured, or displaced by the river rising
- The Imperial Conclave endorsed the casting of the ritual as necessary

- The Silver Chalice could offer emergency aid in Segura and Kahraman

There are a number of settlements here along the banks of the river, and while Martha I Guerra and the Freeborn Assembly tried to deliver a warning, the river rose before many priests in Kahraman or Segura had received it. Many were taken by surprise, their homes and fields washed away. Sobral and Cerevado are given slightly more warning, but not enough to do much more than flee the surging river waters. The morning after the waters first rise too many families are left searching for missing members swept into waters. It is not in the nation of the Brass Coast to wallow in misery and loss - but there is a time for mourning and for grief all the same.

The egregores believe that more than two hundred people of all ages perished in the floods, and easily twice that number have sustained significant injuries, with many more losing their homes or livelihoods. In the wake of the waters' surge, sickness begins to spread. Potable water becomes a premium, where the muddy waters have tainted wells and streams. Food stores have been swept away, soaked, or tainted with filth, and hunger becomes a significant risk. Families are left homeless; some may never be able to return to houses now submerged beneath the new course of the fattened Scorrero.

Perhaps this was a sad but inevitable outcome of a necessary act... perhaps. The heralds of Ossegrahn walk amongst the people of Segura who grieve, and they speak of a missed opportunity: of an offer to guarantee no loss of life to the floodwaters, to ensure that the fury of the river would fall only on unliving stone and metal and not on living beings... an offer that was rejected. There is disquiet at these rumours... but for now it is only disquiet.

During the Summer Solstice, the Imperial

Conclave endorsed the casting of the ritual, agreeing that it was necessary to deal with the greater threat of the Blight in Madruga. There may be sorrow in the Brass Coast but how much greater might it have been if the Dry Patricians had remained a threat?

Given the scale of the disaster here, it may be that the Silver Chalice is in a position to intervene. The grandmaster of the order may use a declaration of Concord to guide their order, urging them to travel to the Brass Coast to offer succour to those in need. Any such relief effort will need to be supported by the Conclave, and require the usual costs of 20 mana. However, a declaration alone will not be sufficient. The scale of the suffering here is significantly greater than that seen in Syrene two years ago. Many more people, spread out over an immense area, require aid. The civil service estimate that to deal with the scale of the threat the grandmaster will also need to gather at least 50 drams of bladeroot, 50 drams of Cerulean Mazzarine, and 75 drams of marrowort to help the order's physicks and apothecaries deal with the sickness and serious injuries. This bare minimum amount of herbs will be enough to save many of those injured and ensure the death toll does not rise; it will also show the people of the Brass Coast that Conclave cares about their wellbeing.

However, if the Grandmaster does choose to undertake this task on behalf of their order they will be preoccupied with the matter for the next nine months. There will be no further opportunities to guide the order until the Summer Solstice 387YE. There is theoretically no limit to how many herbs the Grandmaster might gather, and if they are able to double the minimum suggested here their response will be swifter and more effective, meaning they will be able to take advantage of opportunities again at the Spring Equinox 387YE.

OOO Note: If the Grandmaster guides the order, they should ensure the minimum number of herbs are in their inventory and email plot after the event, instructing them to remove the herbs.

### **Lamentation of Lord Rain**

Lord Rain offered his aid to cleanse the Blight, providing tools to help perform the ritual that causes the Scorrero to rise. A few of his heralds are already in the area, doing their best to provide comfort to those struck by the floods. In the process, they have made it clear that while the *Tarnfather* accepts the necessity of the river rising, he is saddened that the Freeborn magicians chose not to avail themselves of his *other* boon which would have ensured that *no* lives were lost, but at the price of directing the fury of the waters against the structures along the river.

When given the choice the Freeborn magicians chose to preserve objects and buildings, rather than the lives of their people, and that fills *Willowbraid* with sadness. His servants will still offer what aid they can, but he will not turn his full attention on the aftermath of the destruction.

# Glitter

## Repair Cerevado Nets

**Commission Type:** Senate Motion

**Location:** Lucksprings, Segura

**Cost:** 50 Thrones, three months

**Special:** Does not require a commission

- The Cerevado Nets have been significantly damaged and must be repaired before they will provide any more ilium
- This season the seat holder receives eight rings of ilium rather than the expected four
- Once restored, the nets will provide six ilium each season for at least the next two years

The Cerevado Nets are a relatively recent construction, built to "steal" the ilium gathered downstream in Feroz, right out from under the nose of the late-and-unlamented Governor Rahab. When the Scorrero starts to rise, the netriggeres who work there are more attuned to the change than many of the folk used to living alongside it rather than working in it. News of the coming destruction flows faster than the flooding itself, and there is just about enough time to pull some of the larger nets, lift the more fragile ones, and try and get to safety. Even so, they are surprised by the true extent of the floods. Two dozen overly Ambitious, overly Courageous, netriggeres are swept away when the leading edge of the rising river hits the ilium resource. More are injured when the river breaks its banks, flooding into the town where some of them had gathered to watch the show.

Nets are torn, cranes are overturned, and a great deal of damage is done by the rubbish and flotsam churning in the river from

the destruction upstream. After the waters start to calm, the workers return to discover that while there's been a lot of damage done, some of the nets are still intact. There's enough ilium glittering in the mud along the banks or trapped in the torn nets to ensure the Seat holder gets their star metal this season, and more beside. It seems that the rising of the river has maybe knocked loose some great deposit of ilium upstream, or the shift in the rivers' path has caused it to flow more freely or something. Some experienced netriggerers claim they can see specks of star metal in the flow of the river with the naked eye, but that is likely mere braggadocio. The nets themselves are in tatters - extensive repairs will be needed - but once they are up and running again there will be a greater bounty of ilium to claim.

This season the holder of the Cerevado Nets - Lexis i Leharo i guerra - will receive eight rings of ilium rather than the usual four rings. However they will receive no more ilium until the nets are repaired. Civil Service assessment says that it will require a senate motion and 50 thrones from the Imperial Treasury to get the nets up and running again, and at least three months of work. It will not require a senate commission, but could be undertaken as part of more extensive repairs using a single commission and motion. However once they are repaired, they will provide six rings of ilium each season rather than four, for at least the next two years, perhaps longer.

Those civil servants assessing the nets are of the opinion that this could have been significantly worse. The waters have done a lot of damage to the nets themselves, and to many of the ropes and gantries, but they've left the underlying structures in place. If that had not been the case, it would have been entirely possible that the repair costs would have been dramatically higher - assuming that repair was even an options and the

Bourse seat didn't need to be re-established from scratch.

## Crossing

- All save one of the bridges along the Scorrero have been damaged or destroyed
- Travel between Madruga and both Segura and Feroz, is currently impossible
- The Sunset Roads no longer link to the wider Empire

Most of the bridges crossing the Scorrero have been destroyed. Only one is still intact - it seems that the Sobral Bridge has weathered the storm better than might have been expected. A tribute to Freeborn engineering perhaps? It's notable perhaps that this bridge was the main route into Segura for Imperial armies during the occupation of the territory by the Lasambrian Jotun, and during the reign of Empress Britta it was significantly reinforced and strengthened to allow smooth passage to Imperial armies. Still, if the full fury of the river rising magic had been directed against it, it too would have been destroyed.

The other bridges are all gone; the Cerevado Bridge was swept away, and the Rivermouth Bridge that linked Siroc Plains and Oranseri are no more. As a consequence, it is currently impossible for armies to cross the Scorrero further downstream than the Sobral Bridge. This means that armies cannot move directly between Madruga and Segura, or between Madruga and Feroz (or vice versa). It is still possible to move between Kahraman and Segura via the Sobral bridge - provided the regions on either side are in Imperial hands of course.

The destruction of the Cerevado Bridge is also disastrous for the Sunset Roads. Caravans rely on the bridge to reach the rest of the Empire, and without it the benefits provided by the great

work to businesses and farms in the territory are lost. It isn't just the destruction of the bridge that is the problem however; the transformation that has overtaken the northern banks of the Scorrero has also washed away the road that once connected Cerevado to Siroc. Once the situation in Madruga is better understood, it should be possible to restore the Sunset Roads but for now the roads are primarily being used to get supplies to the area of the disaster, and to allow people to move away from the devastated riverbanks.

As to Madruga...

## **Annihilation and Transformation**

- Unleashed waters have swept across both the Blightheart and Siroc Plains
- All sign of the Blight seems to have been washed away

If Segura and Kahraman have been damaged by the floods, Madruga itself is transformed. Guided by magic, the river Scorrero floods down into the Blightheart, what was once the Great Grasses. It foams and roars as it comes, and the few scouts in a position to mark its coming say that it seems almost as if there are great white horses leaping and rearing in the wave that sweeps the flatlands.

Parched as it is, the Blight cannot hope to absorb all this water, not with the flow of Winter magic shut off by those magicians who ventured into the di Tutamen estate to seal the regio there. The magical waters, infused with Spring magic and trace elements of ilium, are utterly irresistible. Within a day they have drowned the entire Blightheart. The waters do not stop moving for weeks, never settling, a maelstrom of fresh water. Sometimes whirlpools or waterspouts form, as their magic reacts cataclysmically with some particular pocket of Winter

magic. When they wash over the estate, their nature begins to shift and change imperceptibly. The waters seem to take on a life of their own – in some cases there are reports of them running uphill or shimmering with the suggestion of colours unfamiliar to mortal eyes. The influence of the Azoth, no doubt.

The river does not stop with the Great Grasses however. It also sweeps into Siroc Plains with all the ruinous chaotic majesty the waters have gathered as they sped down through Kahraman and Segura. It crashes over the ruins of Siroc, drowning them. The sea seems almost to rise to meet them, perhaps a consequence of the Spring Magics worked in Free Landing and the Cazar Straits by the Children of Wrecks. Fortunately for the Grendel, they are in the northern parts of the region, preparing for an attack from the Empire which does not come. The waters catch their scouts unawares, scatter the baggage trains hurrying north from the siege of Oran, bring with them disorder and disarray. It's not clear if the waters catch enough of the armies to damage them, but it seems to have caught them by surprise as much as the people of the northern reaches of the river were surprised.

Rivers and streams break and rejoin across both regions. News comes from Quzar that the river marking the border between Lightsea and Siroc Plains has swollen and likewise burst its banks, now flowing more swiftly than ever before down into the Bay of Catazar. The old Siroc Bridge that crosses it is still intact but there is some worry the shifting banks may eventually wash it away as well.

A month of chaos ensues, with water everywhere. Then the waters begin to subside... but what they leave behind is very different to what was there before.

## **Shimmer**

- A great marsh now covers the southern regions of Madrugá

- The marsh is clearly infused with lingering magic

It was always possible that the rivers' rising, fueled by the chaotic magic of Spring and then infused with the essence of Night, would work some transformation. It's doubtful anyone could have predicted what ensues. The Blight is gone – there's no doubt of that at all. As the waters recede south across what was once the Great Grasses, away from Torres and Calvos Sound they leave behind fertile plains and healthy grasses. The fertile power of Spring has done its work well. Yet many of those grasses are like none found elsewhere in the Brass Coast – peculiarly tall, or strangely coloured. There are reports of odd beasts living among them. Four eyed, winged harvest mice. Oversized dodo. Iridescent serpents.

All too quickly, the waters stop receding entirely. With half what was once the Great Grasses covered, and with most of Siroc Plains still in their grip, the waters continue to flow. What was once the southern Great Grasses, what was once Siroc Plains, is now a marsh to match that of Kallavesa, Bregasland, or Holberg. Where those marshes tend to be cool, rainy, temperate, the heat of the Brass Coast makes the marshes in Madruga steam, leaving them wreathed in fog as often as not.

Both the fog, and the waters themselves, have an odd shimmer to them, a strange magical quality that is quite beautiful when the sun hits it right. There are patches of dry land, and those Imperial scouts who get a look at them report that the Spring magic is doing its work. Plants and animals are returning to the area, but many of them look different to what was there before. With the Grendel armies and navies still camped along the shore, it's impossible to get too close a look. But everyone agrees – Madruga has been changed, likely forever.

# A New Territory

- Madruga is now a seven region territory; the Great Grasses has become two regions
- Madruga remains uncontrolled, with nobody in control of Great Grasses or the new marsh region
- The ruins of Siroc have been swept into the bay or sunk in the new marshlands
- The Empire no longer has a map of Madruga that can be used for scrying

Madruga is still not under Imperial control; they are dominant only in Torres, Calvos Sound, and Lightsea. What was once the single massive region of the Great Grasses appears to now be two regions – the Great Grasses in the north, and a strange marsh in the south. Just as the Blightheart was not under Imperial control, so too are these two regions that have replaced it not under Imperial control – not under anyone's control. Siroc Plains likewise is now a marsh, and notionally at least it is still in the hands of the Grendel. Free Landing, likewise, is under the control of the Children of Wrecks.

The Empire still needs to control four regions to control Madruga; the fact it is now a territory of seven regions is neither here nor there.

Freeborn ships have not yet been able to get close enough to check, given the presence of so many other hostile vessels in the area, but it looks like the coast of Siroc Plains has been changed. The bay where the Isle of the Lyceum lies is now a lot wider.

The ruins of Siroc, burned by the Asaveans, have been swept away. Some have tumbled into the bay, the others have been submerged in the swamp. There is no way to simply rebuild it;

even if a settlement were to be sought it would need to be entirely different to survive in the marsh.

One unexpected effect of this transformation is that the Empire's maps of Madruga are no longer correct. The magical transformation here is sufficient that any existing maps no longer allow scrying rituals such as Eyes of the Sun and Moon or Eye of the High Places to be cast on the territory. This will remain the case until Imperial maps can be updated. It is not just the Empire however; nobody has a suitable map that will let them scry Madruga.

There is currently no obstacle to an army conquering the new marsh territory or the Great Grasses; they would simply need to move in and claim the regions as normal. The Grendel are in Siroc Plains still, which may present more of a challenge to claim that region of the new marsh. Claiming the regions however is not the same as having any idea what is going on with them, but is likely one of the first steps.

The greatest mystery however is what this marsh portends. Will it last, or will it dry up in the Summer? The Scorrero is rich in ilium, likely the reason the transformation has been so extensive. It will require exploration – adventure even – to find out what remains in the depths of the marsh and what it means for the future of Madruga.

## **Into the Southern Reaches**

- The new marshes in Madruga can be explored by military units using the Explore the Southern Reaches adventure
- An army could use the Technique of the Celestial Key or one of the Scouting orders to repair the maps

Following the Autumn Equinox, a new adventure will be available to Imperial military units: explore the Southern

Reaches. It will be found in the spy network dropdown, and enchantments that support spy networks will help warbands who choose to take it. A standard military unit that takes this adventure will receive 6 random herbs and 2 pawns of vis (a combination of vital honey, crystal fire, and even heart's blood) instead of their usual production. Upgraded or enchanted military units will gain more though it is hard to predict exactly what they'll get. The adventure will be available until the end of the year (until the start of the Spring Equinox 387YE).

If at least 5,000 strength is assigned to the adventure in the same season, then the Empire will be able to update it's maps of Madruga. They will know the new layout of regions, and be able to use scrying rituals that need intact maps again. There are other ways to update the Empire's maps as well. The Citadel Guard could use the Technique of the Celestial Key, or an army could take the Gather Intelligence or Guard the Gates scouting orders in Madruga.

Once Siroc Plains and the two new regions are under Imperial control, and the map restored, it will be possible to assess how to link Madruga and Feroz again. Until then, the two regions remain seperated.

## **Mystery and Chaos**

- The Unfettered Mind and the Rod and Shield could be asked to investigate the marshes
- If the Unfettered Mind are sent into the unknown warzone alone, they will certainly encounter difficulties
- As always guiding an order requires 20 mana from the font for each order

There is significant magic at work in southern Madruga. Signs indicate that while there are a few odd animals in what is now

the Great Grasses again, the region itself is reasonably normal. The same cannot be said for the great marsh that spreads in the wake of the Scorrero flood. There are signs that whatever magic was at play there - in the confluence of Spring and Night - is still working itself out. The Imperial Conclave is in the ideal position to explore this area, with an emphasis not on geography, but on the mysteries that lie at its heart.

Two orders are in a position to take a lead. The Unfettered Mind exist to boldly consider possibilities and opportunities that others may not consider. They have been involved with the magical chaos in Madruga since near the start, and there's no reason to stop now! Likewise the Rod and Shield have been at the forefront of the battle against the Dry Patricians, and exist to encourage magicians to use their powers in defence of the Empire, even if they are not a warrior by calling. Both orders are in a position to explore the magical zone, and report back what they find within. Either order's grandmaster could use a suitably worded declaration of Concord to guide their order into exploring the marshes.

The Unfettered Mind, obviously, would focus on seeking out magical mysteries or resources. They could gain understanding of what has happened here, and what it means for Madruga, as well as perhaps locating opportunities to exploit the new situation. They are however not warriors on the whole, and half the marsh is under the control of the Grendel at this time. For that matter, there is absolutely no indication what might be lurking in the depths of the enchanted marsh - it's entirely possible that (for example) giant alligators or marsh bears might eat them long before they even see a Grendel slaver. If they are asked to investigate the marsh they will, but along with any discoveries they make they will certainly get into the kind of trouble that will see at least one and perhaps more of them need rescuing. Unless the Rod and Shield are also there.

The Rod And Shield will focus more on seeking out magical threats or dangers, identifying any areas that should be avoided, and dealing with them if possible. They may also seek out resources or opportunities, but they will likely relate to fighting or strategy than magic for its own sake. They can also keep the Unfettered Mind safe if the order is also asked to explore the marshes.

In the absence of a Grand Lodge, this opportunity is only available during the Autumn Equinox.

## **Further South**

- Feroz has been wrecked by the mismanagement of Governor Rahab, and abandoned by the Freeborn
- Rebuilding the territory will take significant investment
- Both the Grendel and the Children of Wrecks still control regions of the territory

While many eyes are on Madrugá in the aftermath of the magical flooding and the final destruction of the Blightheart, others are on Feroz. The territory has been liberated from the Grendel (as described in the Glass and flame wind of war). There are still barbarian forces there - Mora's Rock represents a not inconsiderable obstacle to the recovery of the territory and there is no sign the commander there intends to surrender to the Empire. The disruption caused by the flooding of the Scorrero complicates the strategy in this part of the world, but there's easy access to Segura at least through Afarjasse, which is under Imperial control again.

During the Autumn Equinox, the territory will be assigned to an Imperial nation. Nobody genuinely believes it will be assigned to anyone other than the Brass Coast. It's possible of course -

but only in the way that Sermersuaq might in theory have been assigned to a nation other than Wintermark, or a liberated Therunin might in theory be given to someone other than the Navarr who make up the overwhelming majority of the people there.

There is, however, a significant complication with Feroz. It's common to see much of the populace of a conquered territory become temporary refugees, eager to eventually return. Others remain behind, either to resist the invaders or in the case of the Jotun to live as thralls until the Empire returns. Neither is the case in Feroz. Three years ago, when the territory was ceded to the Grendel, the Freeborn Assembly urged their people to flee. A mass of Imperial ships and soldiers helped those trapped in Grendel lands, or those who couldn't escape under their own steam, to get to safety (as described in *The Power Behind Our Moves* and *Wind of Fortune*). While there were still scattered people in the territory, they lived under the crushing yoke of Governor Rahab and his rampant greed - and his increasing fury over the many defeats inflicted on him by the Empire. News from the armies sweeping the last traces of his regime out of Feroz speak of a territory wrecked by greed and poor stewardship.

Lives were saved - tens of thousands of people would have lived in misery if they had not fled. But there was a sacrifice here. It required the Freeborn - a nation defined by a refusal to give in, and a passionate drive to find the fire in the dark - to accept that their territory was lost, and would not be recovered any time soon. The Freeborn abandoned Feroz.

Those who settled in Madruga and Segura have found new lives for themselves over the last three years. They have put down roots - as much as any Freeborn does. The farms, businesses, and paradors they left behind have been ravaged by Rahab,

desperate to wring every last drop of wealth out of the territory. They have little to go back for, save bad memories and a sense of loss. The Assembly could certainly speak to them of victory and opportunity, but it will take a lot more than a statement of principle or mandate to recover a fraction of what Feroz used to be. It will take either decades of growth, or significant investment to rebuild bigger, to restore more than what was lost. In many ways, it is as if Feroz is a newly conquered territory; the challenges the Imperial Orcs face in Mareave, those the Dawnish face in the Barrens, or those that the Varushkans faced in Ossium before them are likely a sign of what lies ahead of the Freeborn if they attempt to reclaim Feroz.