

INFERNAL ZOO HOBBY HERO BACKGROUND STORIES

2022

*It was the day before Zoomas
And all through Nor Cal
Every creature was stirring
Even Will of the Joust
The tables were laden with terrain with great care
In hopes that on time players would be there
But from table 4 there rose such a clatter
Alex left his ringers game to see what was the matter
And what to his TO eyes did appear?
But a longship raid and two giants so dear*

- Henry Greip



David K.

Ludwig von Mises, grandmaster of the Templars of Verena, reviewed the forces arrayed before him. The Imperial Prince had commissioned Ludwig to assemble an army as he saw fit to march on the borderlands and defend the homesteads and settlers who lived there. Reports of bands of monsters and beasts were no doubt exaggerated but von Mises wasn't going to take any chances. In addition to Ludwig's own large contingent of his own knights as well as that of two smaller contingents from two allied knightly orders, the prince had ordered the imperial army, engineer's guild and the wizard college to contribute fighting forces.

Ludwig was pleased with the engineers providing one of their precious steam tanks, along with the specialists that were needed to maintain it. He was less certain of the single wizard who had arrived, but if nothing else the man could at least provide some additional scouting with his flying mount. It was most unfortunate that the Church had not answered the prince's call, distracted by a great dispute in the canon that would only be resolved by the next bishops

conclave. Ludwig had already sent word to the prince of this affront to the state's authority, but dealing with that was above Ludwig's pay grade.

There was nothing else to be done but continue and make do with what he had. The imperial rangers had already made contact with the local militias, and to Ludwig's surprise there were multiple reports of a giant with attire from the empire that was friendly to locals who lived in this area. Seeking the giant out and striking a bargain should at least net some valuable information if not an outright ally. The locals claim to trade the giant's labor in exchange for alcohol and gunpowder... and the latter was especially intriguing. Ludwig wanted to hear more about that story, and he certainly had gunpowder to spare.



James W

The Exarch Cytheria leads a combined Daeb force of cavalry and Nabh-worshipping infantry to battle at the Infernal Zoo. Accompanied by her aide de camp, the Warlock Briesqua, she aims to enslave and slaughter her opponents quickly and fill the holds of her temple-provided slaving ships with captives ready for sacrifice once her ships have returned to the Daeb Republic. She brings her magical greatsword, a gift from a High Priest of Nabh on the journey. Originally operating in tandem with a Silexian Officer commanding the cavalry section of the army, Cytheria assumed full command after the Officer mysteriously vanished during the sea voyage, presumably overboard but the raptor handlers did notice they were off their food for a short while just after his disappearance...



Aaron C

Yvraine's outward calm belied the hurricane of fury, doubt and shame that churned inside her as she took in the scene before her eyes. The dragon's nests had been raided...a dozen of the Dragon Guard dead or wounded and three precious eggs were missing. Her uncle stood to her right, a source of calm amidst this devastation. Eingana's presence to her left was another matter, she could barely stand still, which was an alarming state for a multi-ton golden dragon. They must be punished elf... Eingana's voice reverberated through Yvraine's head like an avalanche. "They will be..." Yvraine muttered under her breath as she turned and stalked from the cave.

The massive entrance was crowded with a unit of Dragon Guard and two towering beings that looked like a cross between a giant and a tree. Yvraine caught the captain of the Dragon Guard's

eye and his troops parted revealing their five prisoners bound and kneeling. The elite temple militants were bloodied but defiant...seemingly gloating. Their sixth compatriot had evaded capture and was even now speeding away with the captured eggs. "I'll ask you one last time...who sent you and where did you plan to take the eggs? We will spare your lives in exchange for their safe return". The elves before her said nothing and merely bowed their heads muttering what sounded like prayers.

Yvraine could feel the fire welling up inside her and her control collapsed...cantrips spilling from her lips she grasped the molten torrent of magic and flung it at the prostrate prisoners intent on destroying any trace of their existence and her shame at being the first Dragonlord to lose an egg in her house's history. As the flames enveloped the five elves Yvraine could feel a presence altering the flow of her spell and a voice echoed in her head Do not bring flames to my forest elf, they will be... punished for their crimes. As the echo faded the militants were encased in stone which erupted from the ground around them. Yvraine whipped her head around as one of the giant treemen lumbered over and slowly lowered itself to one knee before her. Green energy blazed from what would be the creature's eyes in a humanoid face and the same voice echoed through her head once more Gather your fleetest forces elf...we will pursue this thief together...they shall not escape us!



Henry G

Blajnar Wolfsblood took one last look back at the frigid coastline of his home as the swift longships departed for a warmer shore. As another harsh winter had drawn near the gods-gifted wanderlust that burned in his people had called on them, demanding adventure, glory and strong drink. Almost three winters ago another tribe had gone to these warmer shores and returned with great bounties and tales of horrible monsters. So with the fire in Blajnar Wolfsblood's heart, the gods on his side and a bloodied sea chart in his hand the fleet set sail.

The Wolfkissed manned the deck of his longship, each one sworn to him a blood oath and without a fear of death, for there is no greater glory than to die with a spear in your hand. His mind wandered for a moment to his loyal wargs, whom he had to leave back home as their ravenous nature was unfit for the sea. In the ship flanking his was Warchief Ardah of the Sea Wives, her tribe was renowned for their ferocity in battle and disdain towards the men of the south. Ardah was no friend but people would never refuse the battle call of the gods, and such pledged her Sea Wives. Behind the Sea Wives prowled the longship of Lokir Fiendbrand and his Scorned. Lokir was said to be cursed to never feel cold nor pain and his warband was compiled of criminals, outcasts and doomed men. Lokir's banner was first to pledge to Blajnar with nothing more than a promise of pillage and debauchery offered.

The fell shadow of a massive carrion bird passed over the deck as Krull upon his nameless putrid beast glided past. Blaijnar had known Krull almost ten winters and had never heard the man speak or utter a sound. But Krull had gathered his Raven Men for this expedition, people Krull had pulled broken from battlefields to offer a chance to die in glorious combat. For the Ravens it was die dishonored and alone or reach the golden afterlife with a greataxe in hand. Finally bringing up the rear of the fleet was a longship of massive size, and at her oars bent trolls and giants, guided by the strongest and oldest of their number whose names are not fit for mortal tongue. Blaijnar had challenged one to a contest of strengths and after thirteen days their banner had been pledged. Shamans and holymen sat amongst the crews, each bargaining with the gods for a swift and sure voyage.

With longships pointed toward Davisberg the Asklanders prepared to greet their gods and crush the weakling southern lands. Throwing back his head Blaijnar let out a long wolfish howl, even as the wind picked up as if to match him and billowed the longship sails.



Micah P

The highborn banners, tinted orange by the sunset, streamed taut in the fierce wind. Asgaru, the highborn commander, sat astride his griffon and observed the ranks of his citizen warriors perfectly arrayed in the dying light of the day, each elf resting the point of their kite shield upon the ground. Ahead, the blood red sun was just disappearing over the far hills, and with the sun's departure the air seemed to thicken and congeal as everything faded to gray.

The gray deepened and the elves held their ready formation as if living statues. Then, in a matter of seconds, the air grew noticeably colder and the wind seemed to grow even more wild, whipping the banners and forcing the standard bearers to dip the flags so that they might not stagger.

The griffon shifted uneasily beneath the commander. The beast had served Asgaru in a score of battles without once succumbing to its animal instincts, but now Asgaru could sense its animal fear as it sniffed the unnatural wind. It pawed its claws at the dark earth and craned its neck from side to side as if trying to detect something invisible to Asgaru, something that was clearly disturbing it.

Asgaru gazed into the dim hills and reflected on the precarious situation. The highborn army had been engaged in a shadow war with the liche king's army for weeks which had now stretched into months. At times, the end of the war seemed within reach as the highborn host scored apparent victories over the army of the dead, slaughtering hundreds in far-flung clashes. But

after every victory, reports would come of another village destroyed, another patrol disappeared, and it slowly became clear that the highborn victories were mere diversions: the detachments of undead that were destroyed were shadow pawns and contained none of the liche king's essential troops.

Asgaru's memory turned to camp celebrations from the beginnings of the war, when his then-eager lieutenants would boast of their seemingly easy dispatch of another legion of undead, flush with wine and toasting their prowess in the warchief's tent. How hollow those celebrations seemed now, and how misguided. Barely half of his original commanders were still living, for it seemed that the enemy had some uncanny sense as to when his officers might be on the move and thus lightly guarded. He recalled Shaewyn's beautiful face on the morning after the battle of dread fen, radiant and exulting as she joked that she'd need to have her sword sharpened after dispatching so many of the walking corpses. And he then recalled that same face staring up at him from the muddy road where they found her corpse, the cold eyes staring at him as if not only her light but her soul had been taken. In fact, the mages assured him, it had, else her corpse would be among the liche king's legions now, with so many of his other troops.

His spell was broken by the long, low note of a war-horn, which to Asgaru's trained ear came from very close, likely just over the next rise. He snapped his attention to the hills a few hundred yards off, and slowly from the congealed night shapes emerged from over the ridgeline, confirming what his ears had told him. They marched in straight ranks, as straight as those of his own troops, a steady march that neither rushed nor dallied, just came forward inevitably, the formations moving in perfect unison. The griffon now began to buck even more and made an unsettling sound that was neither a whimper nor a warning-caw, but something of each. Asgaru had never heard the griffon make a sound like that as long as he had ridden her, and the spearmen next to him who heard it murmured and exchanged uneasy looks.

Forward they came, rusted armor clanking, undead horses and men and elves and no doubt other dead creatures, and Asgaru could sense that the liche was among them. The elves had never seen a host this size, or even a quarter this size, from the start of the war. Now, as his training took hold and he began to calculate their numbers, did he realize the impossibility of a victory. Asgaru had known that the liche king's army was close, but he had had no idea of its true size. In the time leading up the elvish host had been whittled and it seemed that the liche king's must have only grown. As the dread of his inevitable death, and the destruction of his host, took hold of him, he had a vague thought that the dread itself might be some sorcerous trick of the liche or his necromancers. And then he heard the king's voice in his own head, addressing him directly:

"Asgaru of the swordline Aenar, your folly has been a hindrance to me, and know now that you will be paid in full the debt that I owe you. I promise you will die tonight at the hands of my wights, and your line will be extinguished, and I promise to you that while your pitiful soldiers might serve me after their deaths, your soul will be utterly extinguished, severed from the world, severed from your ancestors, and out of sight of even your own gods' gaze."



Cary H

"My Lord, My Lord, I must speak to my Lord" I yelled as I ran up the stairs to the gateway of Khorne and the lair of Lord Dax, Dragon Daemon of the South! As I approached the top of the final step, I was stopped by the Demi God, known only as The Enforcer. "Stop right there Poquit, for I am the only one allowed to speak with Lord Dax!" He yelled as he thrust his mighty Halberd across my body, almost knocking me back to the bottom of the Gateway. What is it that brings you here in such haste he demands "and speak quickly or I shall run you through and add your skull to my collection!"

With that, I began to babble, something about the Sea, the horizon and what has appeared through the mist. "My Lord, many Longships have appeared from the north, through the wind, over a hundred men strong, what shall we do? Lord Dax must be informed!" "Young Poquit" he says, laughing uncontrollably as he bends over in pain from the comedy of the situation, and ignorance of my panic. "Do you believe that Lord Dax, Dragon Daemon of the Gods, could be taken by surprise by some undernourished men from the North?" "More skulls for our collection, more meat for our animals, Prepare the Army for Victory, for bloodshed, and for the Glory of Khorne!"

With that, I ran off to rouse the Army, to prepare for glory, to fill our meat lockers, our Blood wine, and above all else, add more skulls to the throne. Whispers through the ranks revealed our adversary, none other than Blaijnar Wolfsblood, an Asklander seeking fortune and glory. I must inform the Enforcer of what I know, who this man leading the Longships is, and the tales of what he has conquered! And of course, how the Forsaken Ones refuse to grab axes for this fight. Lord Dax requires all in his Army to fight with Axe or Mace - Swords are for little Humans and trophies upon my walls he says.

"Enforcer, I must confess, Blaijnar Wolfsblood is leading the humans, leading them straight to us, and oh, the Forsaken Ones refuse to drop their swords and fight with an axe as Lord Dax requires, what should I do, as they will not listen!" "Well Poquit" he says - "1st off, if the Forsaken Ones want to keep their swords, then so be it, try and take one from them and your skull might end up a trophy around their neck, Never argue with a Forsaken One, I could be bad for your health!" "And as for this Blaijnar human thing, I can't wait to thank him for bringing us so many men and add their skulls to the pile, and his, I shall wear around my neck!!!"



Will S

High Prince Wyl' Liam

You are hereby tasked with defending the Phoenix Pass at all costs. Depart immediately and take with you one regiment of citizen militia, one regiment of swordsmen of the White Tower,

one detachment of heavy horse, and one detachment of light horse. Choose a second to serve as your lieutenant and banner bearer. An emissary from the White Tower will accompany you to provide you with readings from the stars. Scouts of the Lion Wood and archers

from the Queen's own guard will meet you at the pass.

There are also rumors that the mighty Kal' Tvang, an elder frost phoenix, has been reborn and will grace the skies over the Twilight Mountains once again. Perhaps if the stars read

favorably he will come to your aid in battle. Return only when the last snows have melted and the white flowers blossom on the Southern slopes.

May the radiant light of our queen grant you good fortune

Tel Marvis

Master of Arms, the White Tower of the Queen



Andy R

The forest cried. The waning sun lit blazing autumn leaves as wildlife withdrew deeper into the enveloping canopy, and the very trees appeared to contort in order to avoid any contact with the necrotic intruders. Vampires and their shambling cohort had penetrated the wood, their foul presence sapping the bustling life that should be prevalent in the region. Silence in the forest never lasts, and the absence of buzzing insects, tittering birds, and boughs creaking under the weight of primates and sloths is as jarring as an air raid siren in the cities of men. Arrows whistled from unseen bows, leaving every branch and leaf untouched while finding their marks in undead flesh. Hissing with frustration, the vampire searched the trees for signs of assailants, and pounced at the first sign of motion. Necromantic-enhanced metal struck its target, but the bewildered vampire found no blood or skin on the other end. Instead, the very tree itself roared, its crimson leaves coalescing around mammoth branches.



Joel B

Giotto was an aspiring necromancer who dedicated his life and death to the study of the dark arts, but he failed to master any real magic beyond the ability to raise the dead. He spent so much time in graveyards and places of death that he amassed a great following of ghouls, ghastrs, ghosts and even a great shrieking angel of death. Giotto's greatest accomplishment was his cunning ability to trick sibling vampire counts to fight alongside his army. Count Victor and Countess Victoria never aspired to lead an army as they wasted all of their energy squabbling and trying to outdo each other on the battlefield. Victor is a master duelist who seeks to beat his opponents in brutal combat and he fears no challenge. He rides out on his zombie dragon to charge any opponent in his path. Knowing that she could never outmuscle her brother, Victoria turned to master the dark arts. She flies over the land on her monstrous steed reaping souls from afar. Her pet varkolak is never far from her side. When Giotto's army attacks, the sky is darkened by a storm of wings from massive swarms of bats. Out of that darkness, towering monstrosities of death attack from everywhere. All will tremble in fear and fall to Giotto's Menagerie of Death!

Matt B

My army was born to seek power and glory. We were not born of Nobel or special blood (Core Competency), yet with the power given to us we greatly rose above our station. Our God of Vanadra: the Advisory, Dark Lord of Wrath, does not care about men's titles. The general of this army is M'Hael, The Exalted Herald, came from nothing and if he is ever allowed to die he will return to nothing, but for now he is forced to lead us.

This wrathful army often finds themselves conquering new lands. We currently stand over the fields that once belonged to others and now this land is becoming tainted, as everything we touch dies.

We give this pledge and our souls to the dark lord of wrath for our powers.

Our savior, who is in all of us,

Fury be thy name;

thy wrath shall come;

thy killing will be done;

As we have pledged it in our oath.

Give us our power and rage

And punish us for our weakness,
as we deliver those who are weak and frail to you.

Lead us into temptation;

And deliver us from inability.

For thine is the power,
the power and the wrath,
for ever and ever.

In Vanadra: the Adversary name I give this oath

