

Battle for the River Khamita Epilogue

The battle for Wolfsgate had promised to be a long and bloody struggle. While the destruction of the Tower of the Flame ensured that reinforcements from the city of Khamsin would arrive too late to make a difference, and the Rebellion's early failure to intercept his messenger guaranteed that they had no clue of his battle strategies, Andreus still faced a difficult fight. He faced the Red Duchess of Khamsin, a daring general well known for her cunning and inventiveness in battle. Her personal warhost defended the fortress at Wolfsgate so he would need to defeat her strategies and intuitions in order to claim the day in the name of the Empire.

On his signal, ten thousand Atlantean soldiers began the difficult task of slaughtering the Rebels guarding the strategic river-castle. For a couple of hours the battle went well enough, with Magus Tervon, his mages, and an unstoppable horde of Technomantic Golems and Atlantean soldiers steadily claiming territory for Andreus right up to the gates of the river fortress. But when squads of Atlantean troops began retreating from the fortress walls screaming of Rebel sorcery, smoke pouring from their armor, the battle abruptly turned in Khamsin's favor. When Andreus grimly noticed the colors and sigils on the retreating soldier's armor, and mentally placed them as being from the units that had been eliminated at the village of Flintford, he realized that he'd been had by a Rebel trick - and an effective one at that.

Knowing that the Atlanteans would be distracted by the sight of the 'burning warriors', the Red Duchess chose that moment to open the gates and call for a charge across the bridge, taking the fight to the Empire where the Rebels would have the best advantage. A commander first and a father second, knowing that losing Wolfsgate may well mean his son's execution at Jeet Nujarek's orders, Andreus grudgingly gave the order for his army to retreat. He could start this fight another day, and with any luck he would be able to find a solution to capturing Wolfsgate with fewer losses.

But Magus Tervon had spun on him angrily when Andreus gave the order to retreat, rage contorting his wrinkled, aged face. Tervon viciously countered the Lord's order, interceding by the authority of the mages of the Atlantis Guild. In the name of Tezla, Magus Tervon declared, he commanded Andreus to continue to have his warriors attack. Following orders, Andreus did, and watched as his soldiers died by the hundreds.

Andreus witnessed some of the Empire's best men get blown apart by barrages of fuser-fire and black powder explosions. Amazon bladewitches spun and danced amidst his Utems, cutting them down before they could even raise a standard Scythrian blocking stance. Even Magus Tervon was cut down by a hail of black powder fire, his protective spells blown to pieces by the deadly barrage. By then it was too late to retreat out of the churning tide of battle, and it was every man for himself against a deadly, unstoppable Rebel enemy.

When a Dwarf with a blood-red beard dodged past his bodyguards and drove the point of an exquisitely sharpened mining pick through his armor, Andreus thought his life was over. A dozen more times the maddened Dwarf struck at his crumpled form, smashing his armor, his sword-arm, and his ribs in a frenzied staccato of violence. Only then were Andreus' Atlantean bodyguards able to come to his rescue, driving off the maddened fiend before the enraged Dwarf could do more harm.

Darkness and fog encroached; soon Andreus was lost in what he hoped was the cool embrace of death. Soon he would be with his doomed son, Byran, and they could walk together into the night and put this dark day behind them.

But when he opened his eyes, he wasn't where he expected to be. An old man dressed in a tattered gray robe stood over him, leaning on a rickety wooden staff. To his right, one of the Rebel's cursed Leech Medics knelt beside him working to repair his shattered ribs. He knew that he was away from the battlefield as the three of them were alone, sheltered from the summer sun by the sprawling canopy of an old oak tree. What was going on? Why couldn't the fates just let him die?

"Lord Andreus," the old man said in a respectful voice, "my name is Maleficus." He smiled knowingly. "You have to know by now that your son is doomed. My condolences. Magus Tervon himself ensured your son's death this morning on the battlefield, and died for his arrogance."

"You tell me nothing I didn't already know. What do you want with me?"

"I don't want anything with you, Andreus. But after all that you've suffered at Jeet Nujarek's hands, I think I know someone who wants to meet with you. Someone who can help you avenge your son's death."

"Who?"

"Raydan Marz."