

The Battle of the Dust Hills

Excerpt from 'After the Cataclysm, a History of the World' by Citrine Birdclove

And so it was that the Imperial Army marched North with 83,000, leaving Prince Vasil and 7,000 behind to besiege the Khazan, the Emperor and Empress know well that their son and his allies muster their strength and every day that passes more forces arrive to bolster the Coalition. They must find and destroy the assembled army as quickly as possible, lest they lose too many troops to carry the campaign forward.

Prince Vadmir the Younger and his allies meanwhile have assembled some 61,000 forces from across the globe to his war camps, knowing that his parents march North the young Dragonborn is forced to abandon his position and hasten South to meet the Imperial Army and buy time for additional forces to arrive from far-flung lands. Few forces among the Coalition can hope to match the Dragonborn Empire in a pitched battle and they are forced to place their hopes in their superior skirmishers, more numerous cavalry and wider variety of Wizards and Mages.

The two armies meet each other in the bleak and windswept lands known as the Dust Hills, tens of thousands of soldiers array themselves across the battlefield, the battle begins with both forces unleashing their artillery; Repeating Ballista and Siege Catapults trade volleys with newly invented Dwarven Thunder Cannons while War Wizards and Sorcerers from both armies unleash magicks both arcane and divine into the ranks of their foes.

Equa Vaeyaaci leads her Kobold Scouts and the Rangers of Whiteport forward into the battle, met in a running skirmish fight by the Faral the Mercenary and the Elven Ancients. Arrows and bolts fill the air between the two armies as scimitars and daggers meet in a vicious melee. The plucky Urd and the legendary Elf stalk each other across the field as Ancient Druids unleash woodland beasts and sudden hostile forestry upon the Imperial forces only to be cut down by the sudden appearance of the Shadow Blades of the Imperial Princess.

In the skies overhead the Coalition army sends forth the remains of the Sky Fleet of the Far South, joined by ranks upon ranks of flying Infernal Shocktroops generously donated by the El Hadir family, raining fire and artillery down upon the Imperial forces before the Emperor unleashes his Dragons and bodies and debris litter the battlefield from above.

The archery duel between Equa Vaeyaaci and Faral would become the stuff of legend and song(Author's Note: A copy of 'A Tale of Two Huntresses by Citrine Birdclove' can be found in Appendix Q)eyewitnesses claim that twelve times that day Faral shot an arrow that should have killed the Urd only for it to be shot out of the air as the nimble Equa closed in. It is said that their pair stood mere yards apart, locking eyes for a brief moment before unleashing their last arrows of the day.

Faral finally found her mark and planted an arrow in Equa's throat, gritting her teeth in pain as the Urd's last shot buried itself in her arm. Her victory was short-lived however as Princess

Tania Shadowblade appeared from thin air and ran her through with a poisoned sword before vanishing again.

Faced with the decisive defeat of his skirmishing forces Emperor Vadmir orders his main line forward, ranks upon ranks of Dragonborn march forth in formation while cavalry forms up on the flanks. The victorious Elves pepper the Imperial forces as the main Coalition line is ordered forward and the battle begins in earnest.

The Knights of the Holy See and the Royal Jordennes Lancers thunder forward along the flat plains on the Eastern flank, met by the brutal charge of the Dread Corps of the Far South and the Empress' Own Drakeriders. The ground shakes with the force of thousands upon thousands of heavy cavalry brutally charging each other.

In the center the infamous Golems of the Khazan are unleashed only to find themselves matched against the War Machines of the Clockwork Guild, as the towering arcane titans tear each other asunder the Imperial Legion and the Mithril Guard simultaneously split ranks and give the machines their space, engaging ax and hammer in brutal melee.

To the West the Imperial Southern Legion and Imperial Auxiliaries face down ranks upon ranks of Royal Pikers of the Hundred Kingdoms supported by the reformed Elven Ancients and the Order of the First Son.

Victorious in the battle overhead, dragons swoop low over the battlefield, wiping out entire ranks of Coalition troops, forcing Hurkhan Blydmire and his Wizards to turn their powers skyward. Back and forth the battle grinds, thousands dying in the merciless struggle. Princess Tania and her Shadow Blades sow havoc in the Coalition ranks, killing officers and mages at crucial points in the field. The Coalition line begins to buckle under the pressure as the Empire slowly grinds forward.

Ranks upon ranks of Mithril Guards and Imperial Legion pile up, neither side able to break the other, neither side willing to retreat, as the last of the Golems fall the Prince himself is forced to commit to the battle, bringing with him the greatest troops of the Coalition army; the elite Killteams of the Khazan Tax Collectors. Seeing his son's banner join the battle line the Emperor orders his Dragonslayer Bodyguard into the fray, intent on finding his wayward son.

The slow struggle for cavalry dominance inches towards a conclusion as the Coalition slowly encircles the Imperial forces, the surviving Drakeriders rally around the Empress, mount and rider alike exacting a toll of blood for every inch of ground lost as they are slowly cutoff from the main line of the Imperial Army.

Desperate to shore up the collapsing line, the Coalition deploys its last reserve force, sending Sir Malic of Squonk and the Psionic Brotherhood to reinforce the Western flank, their ability to sense minds robbing the Shadow Blades of their element of surprise and forcing a stalemate on that flank.

Emperor Vadmir, wielder of the Holy Blade of Bahamut met Prince Vadmir the Younger, Holy Blade of Bahamut upon the battlefield, surrounded by the dead and dying Father and Son engaged in a vicious duel. What was said between them is unremembered, lost in the roar and din of battle between the greatest soldiers of Dragonborn and Dwarven kind. Holy light flashed

brilliantly across the Dust Hills as the pair met, bringing all the magic, might and will they possessed to bear upon their estranged kin.

Back and forth they dueled, unwavering and unyielding as the Tax Collectors and Dragonslayers battled around them, fire and light blasted out, killing and healing in equal measure, the ground itself seemed to quake and some swear they could hear Bahamut himself roar from the heavens as Sire and Scion waged war.

Elsewhere the heavy toll exacted upon the Coalition cavalry finally did its work, the survivors breaking and fleeing in the face of the seemingly relentless fury of the Empress and her Drakeriders, rallying her remaining troops to her the Empress charges back into the fray, slamming into the flank of the Mithril Guard, even in the face of such an onslaught the valiant Dwarves do not break, but their bravery merely earns them their deaths as the Drakeriders run amok with their meteorhammers.

Princess Tania's attempt to ambush Sir Malic is foiled by his Psionic powers and the pair engage in vicious battle, the fearless Battlemind strikes down the Princess with a mortal injury but she laughs cruelly as she clutches at her wound, the dishonorable poison coating her blades burning within his veins as he struggles to stand. Despite the loss of their leader the Psionic Brotherhood breaks the Imperial forces who flee at the sight of the Princess' death, allowing the Coalition to wrap up the Western flank of the field.

The surrounded Imperial Legion fight with the discipline and savagery they are famous for, refusing to break even as they are forced to stand back to back. Still the Vadmirs duel, wounds enough to fell even the mightiest of heroes adorning their bodies as the spilt blood slickens the ground. Again and again their swords meet, sending bursts of light and flame flying all around, it is said that the glow emanating from the two Saintly warriors forced their bodyguards apart as their struggle reached its crescendo.

A thunderous blow from the Emperor knocked the Prince backwards, nearly slipping in the gore beneath them. Seeing his chance Vadmir the Elder lunged forward as his Son tried to bring his blade up to meet him and a blinding light filled the air.....

Emperor Vadmir the Elder swallowed down the blood filling his mouth, leaning heavily on his son's shoulder as he gasped for air. What was said between the two as Vadmir the Younger slowly lowered his impaled father to the ground is unknown, but this author likes to think her one-time companion died proud of his son.

Vadmir the Younger kneeled heavily in the gore-soaked dirt, struggling for breath as he laid out his father's corpse. One by one the Imperial forces stopped fighting as the Emperor's banner was lowered, each Dragonborn warrior slowly turning to face the center of the field as word spread of what happened.

Vadmir struggles to his feet, turning to face the remaining Dragonslayers, for a long moment the elite of the Empire stared at the killer of the Emperor, before one by one they began to kneel.

And so began the reign of Emperor Vadmir the Younger, a just and righteous ruler, but that is of course a tale for another time.