



# THE WELLSPRING

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# BESIEGED

- Date: Iulius, 166
- Location: Fort Aesica, Hadrian's Wall, Britannia
- Unit: Legio IX
- Rank: Seasoned
- **Composition:** The characters are members of an eight-man *contubernium* with one player character serving as the *decanus*.

## <u>SUMMARY</u>

The characters are members of a *contubernium* in the ninth cohort of Legio IX, stationed with the sixth cohort of Nervii at Fort Aesica during the latter part of the Pictish campaign.

The Picts have pushed the legions back to Hadrian's Wall. During the day, painted barbarians engage with arrows, spears, and skirmish attacks, seeming to appear as if by magic; then fade into the undergrowth. At night, fellow legionaries vanish and strange cries are heard on the wind.

Legio IX is on edge. They've been pushed hard, and are ready to push back.

Someone must find the source of the Picts' power and deal with it.

## PRIMUS

Run several adventures using the Adventure Generator in *Weird Wars Rome* to give the heroes a feel for their area. Their opponents are fierce but disorganized bands of Picts who roam the countryside looking to pick off small bands of Romans.

After a week or so of this, things to strangely quiet. The locals say the warriors just up and vanished into the woods. Experienced soldiers might see this as a sign the rebels are gathering for a more coordinated strike—and they're right.

Run a siege using the Mass Battle rules. The Romans having 10 tokens and the barbarians have 5. The Romans defend from within their permanent castrum, so add +3 to their rolls per the Siege rules found in the *Weird Wars: Rome* Setting Rules.

The legion's legatus has Knowledge (Battle) d10 and a Spirit of d8. The barbarian leader has Knowledge (Battle) d8 and Spirit d8.

The Romans should win handily, especially with contributions from the player characters. Once the barbarians

## CHAPTER I: STRENGTH ET HONOR



have lost two tokens, regardless of the chieftain's morale roll, they depart.

This continues for two more nights, with the barbarians replacing any lost tokens each time (the Romans don't, however).

On the fourth day just before sunset, run the characters' fight at their section of the wall as a regular combat—something's about to change.

Read or paraphrase the following:

"To your stations! The Picts approach!" the guard cries. Your contubernium has been assigned a weakened section of wall to the east. You move toward your shield mates, forming a solid wall against the onrushing barbarians.

A party of 20 Picts have singled out this section of wall to attack while thousands more swarm the surrounding town.

The soldiers' *contubernium* protects a weak point in the wall where it had crumbled and only partly repaired (marked with a white X on the map). The breach is a yard wide (1" on the tabletop) and the rubble extends two yards to the east of it on the outside.

The debris forms a natural if unstable ramp for the attackers. They suffer -2 to their Fighting rolls while within the debris.

Nervian archers support the *contubernium*, using the Volley Fire rules

from *Weird Wars Rome*. The Nervians try to keep the legionaries out of the template when possible, but don't hesitate to include them once the barbarians reach the wall.

The Picts start at about forty yards away and are fully painted in magical woad dye that gives them +2 Armor and the Arcane Resistance Edge. They fight haphazardly, Wild Attacking each round without any thought for their own safety. The legion has fought them before and know them to be fierce fighters, but they've never been this fanatical. Rumors of magic and druids have been discussed for weeks by the time of the attack but this is the first time it seems to have any tangible effect.

- Barbarian Chieftain: +2 Armor and Arcane Resistance Edge from woad body paint.
- Barbarian Archers (10): +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.
- **Barbarian Warriors (20):** +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.

## NO REST FOR THE SAVAGE

After the fifth round of combat, hopefully just after the legionaries believe victory is in sight, the fallen begin to rise. Read or paraphrase the following:

An arrow-feathered body begins to jerk and groan, then it stands. The barbarian tears an arrow from his arm, and rises. You could have sworn he was dead, but he stands again. He moves unsteadily, but he doesn't fall just yet. Perhaps through a trick of the sun, his eyes seem to blaze with an obscene light. Others begin to move beside him.

The Nervians are frozen in terror, unable to act for one round. If the soldiers hold, it inspires the archers to keep fighting and they begin firing on the barbarians again the next round.

### THE LOATHSOME DEAD

The groaning barbarians are undead, enhanced by the woad paint and the sorcery of their as-yet unseen master.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4

Pace: 4; Parry: 5; Toughness: 9

Gear: Long sword (Str+d8).

**Special Abilities** 

• Claws: Str.

• Fearless: Loathsome dead are immune to Fear and Intimidation.

• Undead: +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage (except to the head).

• Weakness (Head): Shots to a creature's head are +2 damage.

• Woad: +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.

#### AFTERMATH

If the soldiers break, either in the initial assault or during the attack by the undead, it isn't a total disaster for the Romans. The rest of the wall holds, and reinforcements are soon on their way.

After the battle, the cohort's commander, Centurion Gnaeus Antius, congratulates the heroes personally-assuming the contubernium held fast against the painted barbarians. He excuses them from duties for the night as reward, and gives them several skins of wine to enjoy. If the soldiers did not hold, he gives them extra duty as punishment. They find themselves cleaning the latrines after. There were unusual soon circumstances in this attack, but Antius promises greater punishments should the group fail him again, up to and including decimation.

Everyone saw the "wounded" barbarians get up and fight again, but most believe they were simply inspired by battle fervor. Few believe the warriors were some sort of "walking dead."

## DISSENTING OPINIONS

While they relax (or shovel excrement), a strange legionary approaches the party. He introduces himself as a member of Legio VI Ferrata. A Common Knowledge check at –2 reveals Legio VI is supposed to be in Judea.

The stranger introduces himself as Titus Decimus, a *frumentarius*. A Common Knowledge check reveals the *frumentarii* are in charge of finding sources of grain for the legions. With a raise, the soldier has heard frumentarii are actually agents of the Emperor, acting as his eyes both within and without the Empire.

Decimus tells the soldiers their courage during the battle impressed him (or else he wishes to give them an opportunity to atone for their failure, as the case may be). He explains he has discovered the source of the Picts' power, and one of them revealed its location under torture. Decimus intends to take a small force into the wilds to take this power for the glory of Rome while the rest of the cohort distracts the main force of the Picts.

"I want volunteers for this duty. Only the bravest deserve the glory. And, moreover, the Emperor's favor. I have Marcus Aurelius' ear. What I hear, he hears. What I see, he sees. Great renown awaits you, if you've enough iron in your hearts."

Decimus finishes by saying they have two hours to make their decision or he'll find someone else, then leaves.

Sometime after the frumentarius leaves, a medic from the auxilia approaches. Unlike the Nervians, he's a Greek. He's in his fifties, healthy, and strong. His hair is still dark and he wears a pointed beard. His tunic is a rust-colored red, with a bronze clasp showing a half-set sun. He introduces himself as Euandros. He claims to be a scholar and he also knows about the source of the Pict's strange abilities. Euandros reveals he is a member of the Twilight Legion only if the soldiers already know of the group and have earned their trust. Unlike Decimus, however, he intends to destroy the Pict's strange power. It cannot be controlled the way Decimus believes, and it represents a disaster for Rome if it remains intact.

"I can offer you no rewards beyond the knowledge this serves Rome and civilization. There is danger, but I know you are not afraid. You are legionaries. You are no cowards."

Unlike Decimus, Euandros has no authority to release them from their duties, and as an auxilia, he is unable to gain access to Centurion Antius. If they don't wish to accompany Decimus, they must first get access to Antius. This is a simple Persuasion roll with the group's *tesserarius* if a character has Connections or is a noble, or a roll at –4 and a good explanation otherwise.

Once they get to Antius, they must convince him to let them leave the fort as its most dire hour. This is a use of the Social Conflict rules. (Use the Centurion statistics from *Weird Wars: Rome* for Antius.)

#### CHOICES

The heroes are likely to think the best option is to have both men along. Decimus knows Euandros will attempt to destroy any unnatural artifact they might across; while the Greek knows the Roman is only interested in the power it offers—regardless of cost.

Under no circumstances will the two ally. The party must choose. The War Master should encourage this debate and allow the players to roleplay their arguments before deciding.

Once the choice is made, Decimus or Euandros nods and sets out separately. The unchosen man appears later in this tale.



## SECONDUS

Whatever the choice, the *contubernium* is urged to head out early the next morning before the surrounding Picts stir.

The locus is thirty miles away. This is a little more than a day's march along the roads, but it takes three days to travel through the wilderness, avoiding the Pictish raiding parties.

If Euandros was chosen, he shows the soldiers a sword he carries. It's an odd design, a long straight blade slightly longer than a gladius with a much thinner blade. He tells the soldiers it is a blessed blade forged specifically to deal with unnatural powers like the one the Picts are using. He instructs the legionaries that if he should fall, they must use it to destroy the locus once they. It is not possible to harm the locus until they slay its master, he believes.

Around midday, the legionaries travel through a forest. Allow them to make Notice checks. If they succeed, they notice a group of Picts cresting the top of the hill before them. Have the

soldiers make Stealth rolls at +2 for the vegetation and the poor angle for the Picts. Success indicates the Picts haven't seen the *contubernium* y e t. Failure indicates the Picts spot the Romans as the heroes spot them.

The raiding party consists of one ferocious warrior, two archers, and one warrior per member of the *contubernium*. All have +2 Armor and the Arcane Resistance Edge from their woad paint. If the Stealth rolls are successful:

A raiding party of Picts crests a hill ahead of you just as you reach its foot. They haven't spotted you among the trees as they begin their descent.

The legionaries can either try a second Stealth roll as the Picts pass by to avoid the encounter entirely, or else attempt to ambush them.

If the Stealth rolls fail (or the soldiers decline to hide):

A raiding party of Picts crests a hill ahead of you just as you reach its foot. They stare at you in surprise for a moment before their leader yells a ferocious battle cry.

The hill is steep enough that it counts for difficult ground going up. The top of the hill is thirty yards from the bottom. The archers fire on the *contubernium* while the warriors charge in, making Wild Attacks.

If they kill the Picts, the crows immediately descend and begin squabbling over the bodies.

If the soldiers try to run, the Picts harass them for a time, but break off once they've sustained significant losses (at least five members of their raiding party). Otherwise they maintain pursuit until either the soldiers are dead or the Picts are unable to continue.

• **Barbarian Archers (2):** +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.

• Barbarian Warriors (1 per character, plus 1 Wild Card leader): +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.

## THE BOG

Later in the day, the party's path takes them through a peat bog. The evening mist is thick and it's very hard to see (Dark illumination).

"The mist closes thick around you as you walk across a peat bog. It should make you feel safer from the prying eyes of any Pictish raiding parties, but something makes your hairs stand on end.

You step softly in the heavy mud...but hear other sounds coming from the wet ground. As if something were digging beneath the sticky peat. Suddenly, the ground trembles beneath you. Arms burst from the muck, revealing dark, twisted faces with empty, hollow sockets where their eyes should be.

Five bog men burst free of the ground on the first round. Three rounds later, one more bog man per member of the *contubernium* rises up.

The bog men attempt to swarm the soldiers and drag them down into the peat. If the soldiers run, the bog men pursue, but cannot leave the confines of the peat bog.

When there are three or fewer left, they retreat back into the muck. They do not attack the soldiers again, but the soldiers' progress is slowed as the peat tries to suck them in. Every few minutes, the soldiers hear something moving through the bog near them. This lasts until they reach the end of the peat bog, sometime near midnight. If they try to sleep in the peat bog, more horrors attack every hour or so (equal to the numbers encountered before).

• Bog Men (5 plus 1 per character): See Weird Wars Rome.

#### ONWARD

The second day goes without incident, though the soldiers see more signs the Picts have been through the area, such as tracks and recently-used campsites. More disturbingly, they keep catching sight of groups of crows, though there's no sign of any carrion or other food sources to attract them.

On the third day, the contubernium reaches a small forest. A short ways in, the soldiers sense something isn't right. A Notice check shows the ground is recently disturbed around the roots of the trees. A raise reveals the presence of half-buried bones among them, as well as the presence of several Picts in the branches above!.

Whether or not the soldiers spot them, three Pictish archers begin firing on the invaders and a Pictish spellcaster begins chanting. All have +2 Armor and the Arcane Resistance Edge from their woad paint.

The round after the archers and shaman spring their ambush, the trees themselves begin to attack—the shaman has cast the *entangle* spell at their feet:

The trees begin to sway, and you hear their roots moving through the dirt below you, threatening to tip you over. The branches themselves writhe in time to the painted priest's chanting!

- Barbarian Shaman: Use Spellcaster from Weird Wars: Rome. +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint. This fellow has the following spells: blind, entangle, stun.
- **Barbarian Archers (2):** +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.

Once the Picts are dealt with the heroes can heal up and regroup. They're within five miles of the locus.

## TERTIUS

The contubernium finally nears the locus in the late evening. A wild wind blows from the north, and though the sun has set, crows fly low overhead, waiting for something. The forest is dark and foreboding. The underbrush is crowded with weeds and fungi. Dead birds, mice, and other vermin litter the ground.

Finally, the legionaries see the glow of a large fire in the distance. As they near it, they see tall oaks surrounding a single ash to their east.

The war camp is made up of a number of small, one-man tents near the trees. There are far more tents than men. At the center of the copse, a pool of water sits. Though the wind howls, the surface is still as ice.

The heroes see the bodies of Roman legionaries near the camp. If they sided with Euandros, they also see Decimus tied up near the pool. Otherwise, they see a Roman officer held captive (perhaps someone the heroes know personally).

The hills surrounding the camp allow the contubernium to attempt to sneak up within twenty yards of the camp. Beyond that, the guards spot them regardless of success on Stealth checks, thanks to the croaking of the crows that cover every tree branch.

A chieftain, a shaman, and a number of warriors equal to the members of the contubernium occupy the camp. When the players are spotted, the Picts take up defensive positions around the pool.

Barbarian Chieftain: +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint.

Shaman: +2 Armor and +2 Fighting damage from woad body paint. He has the following powers: *blast, confusion, entangle, fear, zombie.* His Power Points are unlimited for the next hour due to the sacrifices made to the wellspring.



• Barbarian Warriors (1/Character): +2 Armor and Arcane Resistance Edge from woad body paint.

## THE BATTLE ENSUES

If the soldiers sided with Euandros, the Pictish chieftain kicks his captive into the pool at the start of combat. Otherwise the captive is a Roman citizen or legionary (perhaps someone the heroes know personally).

The sacrifice slides into the pool. There's no ripple from the water, no sign of passage. Then the pool bubbles crimson and a terrible scream somehow issues forth from its depths. A moment later, a deformed creature begins to crawl forth. It has one eye, one arm, one leg, and wears an

ugly shirt of bloody raven's feathers.

The creature is a fachan (see below). Two climb out each round (to a maximum of six), attacking anyone not aligned with the shaman.

- **Decimus:** The Roman turns into a Wild Card fachan (see below).
- Fachan (6): See below.

#### FACHAN

A fachan is a monstrous humanoid with one central eye, one arm, and one leg, originating in Pictish Caledonia. Their bodies are covered in black hair and feathers. Fachans love to fight carry scavenged manmade weapons.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10 Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Throwing d8

Pace: 6; Parry: 8; Toughness: 7 Hindrances: —

minurances: -

**Edges:** Block, Combat Reflexes, Frenzy, Sweep

**Gear:** Battle axe (Str+d6) **Special Abilities:**  • Fear –2: Anyone seeing a fachan must make a Fear roll at –2.

•Leap: Fachans can leap 12" with a single bound.

• One Eye: –2 to all Trait rolls involving depth perception, such as Throwing.

•**Trouble Standing:** Fachan move quickly despite their single leg, but are awkward when standing still. If they don't move in a round, their Parry is reduced by 1.

## THE WELLSPRING

Once the Picts and fachan are dealt with, the heroes hear a beautiful woman's voice, seemingly emanating from within the pool and echoed by the surrounding forest.

"Step into my depths, warriors, and I shall reward you with gifts beyond imagining!"

> If the soldiers sided with Euandros, he takes out the curious blade he carried with him and hands it to the leader of the Romans.

"Do not believe its lies. It is a tool of evil and will twist your words to its own ends. It seeks only to corrupt the souls of men and taint the land with its foul presence. You may have the honor of sealing the portal by throwing this blessed blade into its tainted depths."

If the warrior carries out Euandros' request, a harsh, screeching wind races through the trees. The pond bubbles and froths red—then goes still. The portal is closed and the pool has no special properties.

If the locus is sealed, the Picts' power is lessened, though not destroyed. The Romans have another two years before the power of the painted barbarians' sorcery is entirely broken. But they've dealt a major blow to the dark powers infesting the region.

#### POWER PLAY

If Decimus is alive and present, or the heroes decide to take the power of the well for themselves, it does indeed grant phenomenal power.

The pool is a gateway to another world, a place where the boundaries of reality are weakened, and things can be pushed through. On the other side exists an entity who speaks in a beguiling woman's voice, making promises to whoever holds the ground around the pool. It can summon monsters (fachans, dire wolves, dryads, loathsome dead, and so on), increase the power of spellcasters, or cast powers on individuals or groups. Small favors are granted freely, but greater ones require sacrifices, ranging from small game like rabbits for temporary help (the casting of a power) to human sacrifice (cast a power on a large group for a certain number of

The pool's presence causes changes in the surrounding countryside. Crows congregate from miles away. Bog men arise spontaneously from the peat. Magical creatures, some of whom are not friendly to the pool's master, feel drawn to it.

days).

Ultimately, the locus is a plot device, and it can do whatever the War Master decides is necessary for the adventure. Just remember no one, Pict or Roman, can ever be entirely in control of its darksome powers.





## FIGURE FLAT INSTRUCTIONS

To use, cut around the outside, fold along the interior lines, and use a glue stick to secure the title flap to the back of the first figure (forming a triangle). You can also use only the center two tiles (the second colored illustration and the silhouette) with a plastic base.

Look for more Figure Flats for the allies, enemies, and horrors of *Weird Wars Rome* at www.peginc.com.