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THE ART OF RESTRAINING POWER FOREIGN AFFAIRS

A CRACK IN THE ICE

SUMAAB REMAINS AT WAR WITH THE EMPIRE; THE PORT
OF ZEMEH REMAINS CLOSED.

The changes to Doctrine authored by Bonewall Rek and Bonewall Cole have been successfully communicated to the pilgrims of the Way around the known world. During the Summer Solstice, an inquisition by priests from the Sumaah Republic visited Anvil. With the aid of the Highborn of Felix's Watch, the inquisition took place without any obvious problems. The Sumaah priests then returned to city of Timoj to present their findings to the präster of the Republic.

A month ago, the Sumaah republic formally recognised the virtue of Bonewall Rek and Bonewall Cole. The Sumaah have not as of yet embraced the new doctrines. The Sumaah Council of Eight has however extended a formal invitation to the two Imperial Orcs to come to Timoj and speak before the assemblies of the Way, and the House of the People

Bonewall Rek - the priest responsible for overseeing the dissemination of the Doctrine of the Ancestors and the Doctrine of the Howling Abyss - has accepted the invitation and set sail for the port-city of Zemeh on the first leg of a journey that few Imperial citizens have ever been permitted to undertake.

Gossip around the Sumaah embassy in Necropolis suggests that both House of the People and the Sumaah Synod have already begun discussing the implications of the two doctrines. The scuttlebutt suggests that Tipoa the Insightful, Präst of the Way, Utredare of the House of Wisdom, has given an extremely positive evaluation of the orc priests, and challenged centuries of Sumaah prejudice.

The civil service is preparing a briefing on the situation in Sumaah for the ambassador. The Republic still holds the Imperial Crown, and the port of Zemeh remains closed, but it is possible that a resolution of the "orc question" might finally clear the way for a détente between the two nations and an end to the (admittedly unreciprocated) state of war.

ASAVEAN ARCHIPELAGO

EVERY IMPERIAL FLEET TRADING WITH NEMORIA RECEIVES
AN ADDITIONAL MEASURE OF IRIDESCENT GLOAMING
AND AN ADDITIONAL INGOT OF ORICHALCUM

Relations with Asavea continue broadly positive. The Temple of Balo and the Black Bull continues to provide "spiritual" (albeit idolatrous) support to Asavean citizens in the Empire. Things are looking good. Work on the Temple of the Way in Nemoria is complete - the first priests have taken residency there and begun providing spiritual support to Imperial mariners and emigrants alike. The unfortunate affair of the Cavabianca Dock has been resolved, and the first shipments of white granite have arrived at the docks in Sarvos. It certainly seems as if the detente between the Empire and the Archipelago has gone from strength to strength.

With the temple complete, the appointment of a liaison becomes relevant. The method of appointment was not specified in the original Senate motion so the necessary details are left to the senator who raised the motion - Maher i Zaydan i Riqueza to decide. The obvious methods for appointing the title would be appointment by Senate motion (if the title is seen as primarily diplomatic) or appointment by judgement of the General Assembly, or the Assembly of Nine (if the title is seen as primarily about matters of religion). A case could also be made for making it an Imperial title auctioned through the Imperial Bourse (if the title were seen as primarily economic in nature).

CITADELS OF AXOS

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CHARACTERS WITH A CONGREGATION TO GAIN ADDITIONAL PROFIT BY SELLING LIAO HAS ENDED.

Word from traders visiting the Towers of Kantor is that the Axou attitude towards the Empire continues friendly. The competence of the Imperial Ambassador to Axos, Tarquinius of Ankarien, is widely praised in mercantile and diplomatic circles.

With the completion of the Black Sails Quay in Necropolis, Axou merchants now have reliable access to shipments of liao. Now that they are confident of being able to purchase liao at good prices, the artificially high demand for the valuable spiritual substance has finally abated. The price for liao has returned to normal - 12 rings each dose when sold through a congregation.

During the Summer Solstice, Agnetha de Rondell, Cardinal of Wisdom, extended an invitation on behalf of the Assembly of Nine to Axou scholars prepared to visit Imperial institutions of higher learning and share their peculiar faith. Over the last six weeks, several priests and students of spirituality have visited the Empire to lecture and occasionally engage in mannered debate with their opposite numbers within the Empire.

Most of the priests visiting the Empire appear to belong to a sect called the Order of the Ivory Cup who do not attempt to hide the fact that alongside powers the Empire recognise as Courage and Wisdom they practice a spiritual power that they call Understanding - a power that several scholars find unsettlingly familiar.

Lectures have taken place at the Citadel of Phoenix Reach, Bronwen's Rest Wayhouse in Therunin, the Icy Crag of the Eternal Sun in Miekarova, the Chantry of the Silver Skull in Necropolis, and the Printer's Guild

Museum of Wonders in Tassato. An invitation to speak to the Legion's Rookery in Skarsind was politely declined; the visiting Axou cited the great distances involved. After the initial invitations from the Synod, less formal invitations have been issued by the University of Holberg, the School of Epistemology in Tassato, the Diora University in Sarvos, and several other Imperial places of learning.

The odd philosophies of the Axou priests - a religion based around reverence of their ancestors as well as a vision of a world where the Creator is the enemy of humankind and the Labyrinth of Ages a cruel trick - turns Imperial doctrine on its head at every turn. Despite the almost preternaturally courteous nature of the Axou, there are some angry scenes in which offended priests openly seek to challenge their eastern visitors. While visiting Tassato, two of the priests are pelted with rotten vegetables and eggs by students from the School of Epistemology, and after a lecture at Bronwen's Rest a third priest is subjected to a curse of swarming insects. In each case, the priests cooperate fully with the magistrates - and are not shy about pressing charges where appropriate.

PRINCIPALITIES OF JARM

THE SOUTHERN PORT OF VEZAK WILL SUPPLY AN
ADDITIONAL CRYSTAL MANA TO EACH VISITING SHIP.

THE NORTHERN PORT OF KAVOR, AND THE EASTERN PORT
OF RIGIA, PROVIDE NO ADDITIONAL MATERIALS.

Relations with Jarm remain positive. Imperial captains continue to receive warm welcomes and secure good deals with merchants in Vezak. Sadly, the port of Kavor has become a little less welcoming in comparison. There is a little muttering among the northern princes that the Empire clearly favours their traditional rivals in the southern alliance, as demonstrated by their preference for Vezak over Kavor. Still, Imperial captains are still welcome - it is simply that they are not seen as especially favoured trading partners.

The presence of the Sumaah temple continues to make Rigia a little chilly for Imperial captains. There is also talk of in-fighting between the Princes of the eastern faction - while their alliance has largely been recognised as a peer by the Princes of the north and south, this is a double-edged sword. The "upstart" faction is now being forced to compete with the much better established factions on an equal footing, and this is proving to be something of a challenge. The continuing decline of Imperial fleets visiting Rigia - especially in comparison to the more prosperous ports in the north and south - only exacerbates the situation.

FARADEN

THERE IS NO OPPORTUNITY TO TRADE WITH FARADEN
DIRECTLY DURING DOWNTIME.

Relations with Faraden remain uncertain. The decision of the Senate to approve a trade hub in the Upwold settlement of King's Stoke has been met with widespread approval, and seen as a sign that a long-planned expansion of Faraden presence in the Empire is finally beginning to see some progress. Sadly, work has yet to begin - but the Faraden have already moved wagonloads of white granite into warehouses in Anduz in anticipation of their contribution to the project. The Court of the Five Winds is said to be very enthusiastic about securing easy access to Marcher grain, fruit, and alcohol.

Rumour says that Lady Saretta - the Faraden advisor to the Court of the Winds - favours similar enclaves in Dawn and Varushka. There is even talk of establishing "mercenary markets" in Tassato and Temeschwar when the enclaves are complete, dedicated to helping Faraden traders secure guards and guides for their trade with the Empire. Furthermore, Faraden merchants visiting the Empire have waxed lyrical about the grand construction project currently underway intending to link the four League cities together - the Blood Red Roads. The merchant families of the west are very keen to see that network extended to Anduz, in Segura, and have apparently been negotiating an offer to provide cheap white granite to help with such a project.

The positivity of the Faraden merchant families is not universally reflected in the nation as a whole, however. While many of their wizard families remain neutral or broadly pro-Imperial, most the warrior class, and much of the priestly class, remain suspicious of the Empire. So far this anti-Imperial faction has not taken any direct action against the Empire, however.

Finally, reports continue to reach Imperial traders of a virulent blight that has all but wiped out iridescent gloaming production in Faraden. The Gloaming Road - an arrangement overseen by Antonio i Carno i Guerra whereby the Freeborn export the valuable pigments in return for precious mithril - appears much in demand.

SARCOPHAN DELVES

HERB PRODUCTION HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL

Relations with the Sarcophan Delves remain cordial, but neutral. Traders from the mercantile nation are a common sight in the Empire - not just around the Bay of Catazar but often much further in land. There have even been reports of a band of Sarcophan traders braving the long roads to Skarsind and Hahnmark on a speculative jaunt to sell herbs and healing supplies to the orc bonesetters and Wintermark's grimnir.

An agreement with the Grendel to ensure their ships retain free access to the Imperial ports remains a popular topic in waterside taverns and brothels; Sarcophan merchants make no effort to deny the presence of an orc embassy in the Delves. Sarcophan captains are more cautious about accusations that they are trading equally with both the Empire and the Broken Shore - especially rumours that they are selling Imperial goods on the docks of Dubhtraig! While such behavior would not be illegal - if it were taking place - but it could damage Sarcophan merchants' ability to trade profitably in Imperial ports.

The surplus of Cerulean Mazzarine, reported last season, has ended and prices have returned to normal.

THE COMMONWEALTH

TRADE WITH LEERDAM AND VOLKAVAAR REMAINS STABLE.

Relations with the Commonwealth have not deteriorated further, although they are at best described as "cooly civil". Continued favoured-trader relationship status with Jarm appears to be the main reason for the relatively poor condition of relations between Empire and Commonwealth.

During the Summer Solstice, a representative of influential Commonwealth general Bernhardt Adenauer, commander of the Wagenkorps, visited the Empire in an unofficial capacity. The Wagenkors is apparently a Commonwealth army specialised in logistics and resupply that traditionally espouse strong views around abolitionism and emancipation. Information has filtered back that the representative has delivered a relatively optimistic report of their time at Anvil, expressing the opinion that the actual people of the Empire appear broadly anti-slavery - and that many of them see cordial relations with Jarm in particular as an opportunity to attempt to convince the Princes of the advantages of an economy not founded on slave labour. The attitude is widely derided as lacking any credibility and seen as hopelessly optimistic at best - and fundamentally self-serving at worst. But it is used by a few to suggest that the Empire might eventually be persuaded to take a more enlightened view of the evils of slavery.

THE ORCS OF OTKODOV

THERE IS NO OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPERIAL FLEETS TO TRADE WITH THE THULE, THE DRUJ, OR THE BARRENS ORCS DURING DOWNTIME.

With the completion of the Embassy to Otkodov in Miekarova, the northern orcs have grudgingly recognised the recently appointed Ambassador to Otkodov, Juha the Cavespider. Their emissary, Rak Who-Speaks-For-The-Dragons-United, is reportedly less than pleased he has had to give up the relative comforts of Void for the freezing weather and relative isolation of Coldmere, but has done so with relative good grace.

Shortly after the Summer Solstice, a small detachment of red-cloaked Thule orcs escorted a contingent of some fifty human slaves to the foothills of the Silver Peaks in Sermersuaq. The humans - all Imperial slaves taken either during the recent invasion of Skarsind or during Thule aggression in the Silver Peaks - were equipped in crude but serviceable furs and boots, and provided with sufficient food and water to reach Atalaq. All fifty slaves belonged to the Thule Warlock Skogr the Red, and were apparently freed as a result of a ransom agreement with the people of Wintermark. The slaves are currently readjusting to life in the open air - some of them had spent years working underground in mines for one Thule master or another before becoming the property of Skogr the Red.

Skogr the Red has also expressed his intention to send representatives to the Varushkan Winter Market during the coming summit to trade on his behalf - it is not clear whether this presents another opportunity to ransom slaves; whether the warlock is interested in merely purchasing Imperial goods; or whether this is a chance to acquire interesting Thule treasures.

The Dragons continue to offer to participate in the northern trade network, and remain interested in acquiring the remnants of the Runeforge beneath Gildenheim. If they have other offers to make, it is likely they will be detailed in the briefing delivered to the ambassador at the Autumn Equinox.

AN APPLE THAT FALLS

MORE MOURNWOLD

The situation in the Mournwold remains tense. The Jotun seem to finally be being routed - the war is almost over - but the anger remains. Those who try to reason with the Mournwolders over the actions of the Empire are met with frank words. People here talk less in terms of liberation... and more of the Imperial conquest of the Mourn. The Jotun are not completely gone but already a few people have begun to talk wistfully of how much better things were when the jarls ruled the Mourn. The Empire has won this war - but it remains close to losing the Mourn.

The Empire took four significant actions last season to improve the situation in the Mourn. Marchers deployed their granaries and storehouses to help provide food for their neighbours which wasn't asked for but was all the more welcome for it. The Imperial Senate also approved a payment of 75 thrones to provide for the orc thralls through the coming winter, which was the least of the things the Mourn asked for - but still generated some respect. People were disappointed but not surprised that the Imperial Military Council did not support a plan to stop their armies giving ground. More than one Marcher laughs about "Dawn's glorious generals... always ready to give ground at any moment". But the Marchers did the right thing and put a stop to that for their own armies - showing everyone what it meant to be a Marcher and proving themselves in the eyes of many here.

Crucially the Marchers were able to reign in the Imperial armies, limiting further loss of life on all sides of the conflict. The orders issued to the four Marcher armies all amounted to a steady advance designed to minimize casualties, but it wasn't just the Marchers this time - the Imperial Orcs also took the same approach. If this behaviour continues over the seasons ahead it will have an increasing effect on attitudes on the ground in the Mournwold - blunting the criticism that this was about killing the Jotun and that the Mourn is just a convenient battlefield for the slaughter.

Sadly the immediate benefits gained from the Empire's generosity towards the Jotun thralls were largely squandered by the message sent to the Mourn (and the wider Empire) from the Imperial Warmage in which he appeared to defend the decisions of his predecessor and affirmed that he would repeat them in the future. Following the Imperial Address, the situation in the Mourn is now so febrile that it is impossible for the Imperial civil service to fully assess the situation, indeed it is increasingly dangerous for

anyone who isn't a Marcher to be abroad alone in the Mournwold right now... As a result they are unable to advise on clear solutions that might be implemented - the best they can do is summarize the key problems and identify possible areas where action might be taken to mitigate the situation.

What might help is that three of the leaders of the Mourn are intent on attending Anvil this summit. Mel Greenhill, Long Tom, and Edda Counter are all well respected prominent citizens - they are well liked and influential people from across the Mourn. Mel was in Anvil last season, but neither Tom nor Edda have set foot outside the Mourn before now. But the three of them are coming now, bringing the concerns of the friends and families with them. If these three people return home with good news and fair words - it'll sway enough folk to calm the Mourn. If the opposite happens then the Empire had better not remove its armies from the Mourn anytime soon...

CRUEL LEADERS ARE REPLACED

THE MOURNWOLD SEEKS PROTECTION FROM THE IMPERIAL WAR MAGE AND THE IMPERIAL CONCLAVE

In the aftermath of the magical slaughter wrought by the Empire, Martin Orchard raised a judgement that was passed unanimously by the Marcher Assembly: "The Urizen General has been rebuked by the Synod. The Warmage has lost his seat over this. Those responsible shall be held to account." This was far from sufficient to mollify those who had had to bury their loved ones - but it did at least give those loyal to the Empire a case to argue. Those responsible had been held to account and punished. Few people felt a "rebuke" was sufficient punishment - but the implication at least was that people understood that what had happened was wrong and that it would not happen again.

Then the Throne granted the new Warmage, Heilyn Bronwen's Rest, the right to address the Empire. When his words are heard in the Mournwold it causes riots. Couriers carrying the messages are threatened, two are beaten badly, one near to death. A few voices point out that the Empress is understood to be an ally of the Mournwolders, one who understand their anger and shares their tears - so the Warmage can't be using her address to say what he appears to be saying. There must be something more to it than that they reason.

Sadly most people see a different interpretation. Heilyn agrees, even knowing the death toll and how many innocents would die, with the decision to curse the Mourn. The idea that anyone has been rebuked, that anyone has lost their title as Martin Orchard claims are all irrelevant when the replacement indicates that they absolutely agrees with the decision of their predecessor. They also state clearly that they cannot promise not to do it again. That last part in particular is taken very badly - with more than a few people arguing that it is intended as a veiled threat... The Mourn had better not step out of line... because if it does... then the Warmage stands ready to kill the rest of us if needed...

As a result of this "threat", the people of Mournwold are looking at what steps might be taken to protect themselves from the Empire - specifically from the Warmage and the Imperial Conclave. Their ideal solution would be to have these rituals removed from Imperial Lore - but they know now that that is

unlikely to happen. The Imperial Senate has spoken flatly rejecting any attempt to place these rituals beyond use.

Even so there are things that might be done. The Conclave interdicting these awful rituals would be the least of them. It won't convince many of the Empire's good intentions - the view is that the Conclave would just remove the interdiction next time it wants to use them. But it would be something.

Alternatively the Conclave could choose to replace the Warmage with someone who would promise not to use such magics again - someone who speak clearly to the mistakes of the past.

But "You don't expect your neighbour to plough your own fields" as they say in the Mourn. Perhaps the Marchers should stop relying on others to protect them and set about it themselves. To that end the landskeepers have drawn up a plan and sent one of their own - Long Tom of the Chalk Downs - to see if there is anything that can be done to make it happen. The plan apparently involves a chain of dolmens set at key points across the territory - which might protect the populace from the worst effects of any territory-wide curses. The only problem is that it would require a lot of mithril...

SURE OF HAVING SOMETHING

THE MOURNWOLD SEEKS EVIDENCE THAT THE EMPIRE'S INTERESTS IN THEIR LAND RUN DEEPER THAN CLAIMING THEIR MITHRIL MINES

One of the criticisms of the Empire is that it is interested in killing Jotun and the Mourn's mithril and not a lot else. Those citizens who support the Empire are pointing out that the Marcher folk are truly free for the first time in a generation. They no longer have the Jotun taking the lion's share of everything they produce. But those who are angry at the Empire for the slaughter they wrought point to the Singing Caves and claim that the Empire will be taking everything the Mournwold has just like the Jotun used to do. There are many things the Empire could do to address this criticism, some more expensive than others.

The Marchers of the Mournwold have already expressed their enthusiasm to see the Singing Caves declared a Marcher national resource. That way it will be run by a Marcher and the mithril it produces can be used for the good of all the Marcher territories. They could use the mithril to protect themselves from the Conclave's magic and help the landskeepers rebuild their mana sites. They could raise military units that would be used to defend the Mourn from any who sought to conquer it. Giving the Caves to the Marchers would blunt the accusation that this war was about more than mithril and murder.

Indeed, the Senator for Mitwold attempted just that in Autumn 380YE - but the motion was vetoed by the Throne. Wise heads point out that Imperatrix Lisabetta has made clear that no seat will be declared National. But the Marches is the only nation of the Empire that doesn't have its own Imperial Bourse seat - so the argument goes - surely the Empress can see the unfairness of that? Surely she'll see how the Mournwold people have suffered? Surely this time she'll make an exception...

If the Empress did choose to allow the Singing Caves to be allocated to the Marchers it would have a significant impact on the situation. They understand that the Empire's coffers are running dry and that a new mithril seat could fill them. Allocating the Caves to the Marches would not remove the grievances that all feel - but it would prove that the Empress was prepared to acknowledge that suffering that the Empire had inflicted on them. It would prove she was on their side and greatly improve her standing there. The wealth that flowed from the Caves would significantly improve the Empire's standing and that alone would be enough to ensure that there was no chance of open rebellion in the future.

One step the Empire has taken that has considerably improved sentiment in the Mournwold is the allocation of the Breadbasket to feed the Mourn. The people here are not starving, they fed themselves during the Jotun occupation and they can feed themselves now. This is Marcher land in its bones and so there are prosperous yeoman farmers here even now. But... there are nowhere near as many of them as are found in Upwold or Mitwold. The land there is just so much more fertile - in the Mourn the wealth of the land is in the mines dug into the hillsides - not fields of crops. Now they are beginning to see the prospects that this impressive feat of Marcher engineering might provide.

When the granaries and storehouses of the breadbasket were built the Mournwold was almost totally controlled by the Jotun - so there are only a few links to the breadbasket in place. But if the Empire spent an additional 20 wains of weirwood and 20 wains of white granite then similar silos and stores could be built across the Mourn. But these stores wouldn't be used to hold grain produced here - but rather to bring it here from the Marches. That would allow many more men and women, to work the more prosperous mines rather than herding sheep on the arid hills. It would mean permanently surrendering the ability of the breadbasket to support additional Imperial armies - but it would extend the financial benefits of the old breadbasket to every Marcher territory - and with the flow of wealth from the new openly mines, the returns for everyone would increase by half as much again.

If the Empire won't do either of those things (and there is a lot of scepticism that any of that will happen), then there are less impressive things the Empire might do. Sarcombe was once a prosperous mining town, rich off the back of trade in green iron from the Southmoor hills. It's a ruin now, destroyed in the previous invasion of the Mourn, but it could be rebuilt. The more resources the Senate was prepared to commit to the reconstruction of Sarcombe the greater the restoration of Prosperity to the region. Such a move would kill two birds with one stone as well - since it would help raise levels of Prosperity across the territory - which would mean that taxation rose quickly to the level seen before the Jotun took the territory. Sadly the fact that the Empire might well be the biggest beneficiary of such a move would limit any positive improvement in local sentiment if this were all the Empire managed.

Of course, before the town could be rebuilt the region would need to be liberated from the Jotun still garrisoned at Hillstop castle there.

WILLING TO DIE FOR IT

THE MOURNWOLD SEEKS A WAY TO DEFEND ITSELF
AGAINST AGGRESSORS

Although the Imperial armies have largely driven the Jotun forces from the Mourn, two regions remain under Jotun control. Most folk here expect the Military Council to finish the job - it is just good sense to secure the territory while the Jotun are on the back foot. But then what? The Jotun have pulled back to Liathaven, they must be resupplying their armies already. How long until they return in force? A season or two? A year at most? They took the Mourn once - what is to stop them taking it again?

The answer of course would be to build some solid fortifications. Just look at how much effort the Empire is having to make to drive the Jotun out... A couple of solidly built fortifications would help to secure the Mournwold against the inevitable return of the Jotun. Perhaps if the Empire fortified the border - it wouldn't need to use ritual magic to wreak indiscriminate slaughter. Sceptics claim that such fortifications would take a year to build, but it is soon pointed out that it might not be in Imperial Lore but some magicians recently performed a ritual to speed the construction of fortifications. Perhaps the Conclave could begin to redress the balance of their crimes here?

A single fortification would not be sufficient to placate the Mourn - there was one of those in Overton and it fell quickly enough. But two would be mitigate fears - and three would calm them further. Perhaps the fortification at Overton might be rebuilt, with another at Green March and maybe Southmoor. If the Empire would just do what the Jotun do - and fortify their territories with a ring of castles - then the people might begin to feel safe.

Of course there is one step that the Empire could take to really improve the view of them here. They could build the fortifications - and then hand control of them to local Mournwolders. Never mind Imperial garrisons - give complete control of the fortifications to the Marchers who live here. Then the Mourn can take care of the Mourn. Of course such people would need to be paid - so it wouldn't save any money. In fact it wouldn't have any Imperial benefits at all. But if the Mourn ever tried to rebel... then the castles would be theirs to be used against any outside force that tried to impose its will on the people.

Not many people can see that happening. It would a lot of trust from all sides, and at the moment there isn't much trust to go round. Much more likely in most minds is that nothing will get done - the Senate will say it is too busy and too broke to build any fortifications in Mournwold and that will be that. Of course what it could do is restore the powers of the Imperial Master of Works. The title has always been a Marcher position and it served the Marchers will... until the Empire stripped it of its real powers. Giving the Master of Works the power to commission fortifications wouldn't improve the situation in the Mournwold by itself - but it would help to prevent it deteriorating further.

Edda Counter in particular is keen to talk to the Master of Works and to anyone who is prepared to discuss fortifying her homeland. She is interested in the disposition of the Mourn's mithril also - but as she said when she publicly rebuked the Elston Steward at the big meeting in Shaffy's Inn - "You don't own it unless you can defend it."

SILENCE IS ARGUMENT

THE MOURNWOLD SEEKS ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR PEOPLE
AND THEIR BELIEFS

There is of course still the matter of the remaining people of Whittle whose village remained unconquered by the orcs for thirty years. Their attempt to help fight the Jotun, and their ultimate flight to Tassato, created ripples that have still not entirely settled.

Protracted effort on the part of prominent citizens of the twin cities - led by Senator Cesare - has gone a long way toward helping the Whittlefolk open up a little to their new neighbours in Tassato Mestra. "When we go home", they say, "we'll surely keep a piece of Tassato in our hearts". They are already taking steps to ensure the agreed flow of green iron to the Chamber of Commerce continues, even should they themselves return to Freemoor. Little Mournwold, as the enclave claimed by the Whittlefolk is already known, will continue - there are other Mournwolders, like some of those who fled the Greensward, who will happily remain in residence.

Home. The Whittlefolk dearly want to return there - the Whittle Hill is liberated by the Empire, the Jotun pushed back westward. There is a problem however. The Whittlefolk make no secret of the fact that in addition to the seven Virtues, they recognise the false virtue of Hatred, openly speaking of a force the Imperial Synod decries as ultimately malign, as blasphemy. A blasphemy that has already claimed the life of Friar Robin of the Whittlefolk, executed for his beliefs by the Imperial Magistrates at the behest of the Marcher assembly. Yet the Whittlefolk have made clear, time and again, that they will not abandon these beliefs, nor tolerate any dilution of them.

The folk of the Mourn, when asked, seem to support the return of the Whittlefolk. Despite everything, there was a band of Whittlefolk at Overton when it fell, fighting on the walls of Orchard's Watch against the Jotun, giving their lives alongside their fellow Marchers to try and defeat the orc invaders. Many Marchers take a practical view of religion. There is a sentiment that the religion of the people from Whittle Hill is a matter only for them - not for other folks, and most especially not folks outside the Mourn. After all, there are no shortage of people who hate the Jotun in the Mournwold. During the occupation the continued liberty of Whittle was a source of comfort to many living as thralls in the eastern Mournwold. To some, they are heroes. More than a few are keen to talk to the Whittle people when they return - to find out more about this spiritual force that gave them the will to resist the Jotun for so long.

The Whittlefolk - led by Margaret Steward - are worried, however. While they have time and again been warmly received at Anvil by their fellows, the fact remains that the Marcher Assembly have repeatedly condemned them. No less a figure that Bridget Talbot raised the mandate spread by Sister Meredith encouraging Marchers across Mitwold, Upwold and Bregasland to shun them.

The truth the Whittle folk must endure is that those mandates decisively influence the behaviour of Marchers who do not attend the summits. It's all well and good having friends in Anvil but all their kind words aren't worth a bucket of pig shit when the Marcher Assembly condemns them. If their friends can't influence the Assembly to speak in their favour - then the Whittle folk may simply have swapped an orc enemy for a human one.

As the Whittle folk made preparations to return home, discussion of their fate is contributing to feelings of discontent with the Imperial Synod in the Mourn. There have been statements in some national assemblies that support the use of any available weapon - including the kind of weapons that resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. Support for all weapons that is except for the spiritual force that drove the Whittle folk to successfully resist the Jotun for three decades. Apparently it's fine for the Navarr to hate the Jotun but Marchers who Hate them face condemnation and execution by the Synod. People compare this principled defence of spiritual rectitude by the Imperial Synod with its pragmatic acceptance of thousands of Marchers slain at Imperial hands and they don't like it.

Even those who sympathetic to the plight of the Whittle folk accept there is a clear danger in allowing the return of a group of unrepentant blasphemers - a people deeply proud of their Hatred - to a territory where passions are inflamed with raw wounds and fresh grievances.

The Imperial Senate could theoretically deal with this problem once and for all - if they passed a law making it a capital offence to be dedicated to Hatred, then the magistrates could purge the Whittle folk using similar methods to the ones used to root out the Vyig in recent years. Such a move would categorically end the risk of Hatred spreading through the Whittle folk - but it would be taken extremely badly by the other inhabitants of the Mourn. Head Magistrate Stanislav Karkovich has, however, expressed his opposition to such a move, and warns that at the very least such a motion would be subject to extensive scrutiny and would certainly be constitutional in nature. He has invited lawmakers to speak with him on this thorny subject during the Autumn Equinox at Anvil

We send named priest with 25 liao to urge Tassatans to come forwards with any evidence of blasphemous acts by the Whittle folk.

General Assembly or League Assembly Mandate

If the Senate will not or cannot act, then the General Assembly or the League Assembly might pass a mandate urging citizens of Tassato to provide evidence against those among the Whittle folk who follow Hate. This would not be as effective as making the false virtue a capital crime - but it would provide the Synod with the means to call these people to inquisition or move directly to condemn them. It would be taken just as badly as intervention by the Senate - but it would also have the advantage of identifying any Tassatans who have been tempted into Hate, should such exist. Alternatively, the cardinal of Vigilance could instruct the Silent Bell to look into the Whittlefolk and identify any blasphemers among them.

The Whittle folk themselves are hoping that when the new senator is appointed they will make a public statement on the matter. They have asked the senator to send a winged messenger to Margaret Steward in Tassato to state whether they be welcomed home. The Whittle Steward appears to have identified that her people have no support of any kind in the Marcher Assembly - and no hope of getting any - so she intends to appeal directly to the elected representative to speak on their behalf. Any letter will be shown by the Steward to their critics - assuming it endorses their worth.

One option that would significantly improve the situation in the Mourn is if the Synod chose to repudiate their earlier calls to shun the Whittle folk and instead laud these people as heroes. It will be extremely difficult and time consuming to change the views of those in the other Marcher territories - who are now

minded to shun the Whittle folk - but simply taking the action would be enough to convince the Mournwolders of the Synod's good faith - that it cares about land and people as much or more than it cares about souls.

The Assembly sends named priest with 150 doses of liao to spread the word throughout the Marchers that the Whittle folk are heroes who resisted the Jotun occupation for thirty years when all else failed.

General Assembly or Marcher Assembly Mandate

If this mandate were spread across the Marches then it would cement the reconciliation between the Marcher people of the four territories and convince many in the Mournwold of the Empire's good intentions, especially if it were passed with a greater majority by the General Assembly. Of course it would also mean that folk across the Marchers were then inclined to view the Hateful Whittle folk as heroes to be listened to, rather than heretics to be shunned. That would go a long way to settling the current rebellious mood of the Mourn but would be certain to cause problems later.

Mel Greenhill of Mourn is a monk from the Mournwold who is well regarded by many there on matters of faith. Their opinion of the solutions sought by the Empire to this problem, along with the views Long Tom and Edda Counter, are likely to be pivotal in determining the views of the Mournwold going forwards.

MY END WILL BE MY BEGINNING

THE MOURNWOLD DEMANDS A RECKONING

There is one other action that might help to calm the mood of the Marchers. An old tradition - older than the Empire - some say it is as old as the Marches themselves. Less than a year ago the Empire took actions that resulted in the deaths of thousands of inhabitants of the Mourn. Even those who understand and can accept that there was a strategy behind it all are adamant that there must be a reckoning.

The Synod told the Mournwold that folk had been "rebuked" for the deaths. Rebuked!? In the Marches you rebuke a child for not doing their chores when they're told. Those that cast these rituals, those that brought death to the fields of the Greensward... they were not children. There must be a reckoning.

There were tens of thousands of deaths in the Mourn - even granted that most of them were Jotun - that still leaves thousands of Marcher citizens slain. That is a price that can never be balanced out. Everyone understands that an eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind. But still... there must be a reckoning.

Out on Old Tam Shaffer's farm - under the eaves of Black Hill Wood men and women are leaving piles of straw and wicker. Not a word is said to anyone, but the pile grows ever bigger. Folk who have the time

lend the old Landskeeper of the Wood an hour, helping him weave the wicker into a frame. Steadily it takes shape, like a child growing into a man - a wicker man. The tears for the dead have all run dry. Now there must be a reckoning.

It remains to be seen who among the Marchers has the strength to be counted. Whose death will bury this grudge? Whose end will be their beginning? The wicker man will burn at the eleventh hour on the night of the Solstice. All Marchers are called to bear witness... There must be a reckoning.

DESPERATE AFFAIRS, DESPERATE MEASURES CATAZAR, THE GRENDDEL, THE WIN IN SWIMMING

This season past, just as the Grendel armada set sail against the Imperial navy, there was a marked increase in activity by the independent Grendel captains. In addition to the usual raids against Imperial trading ships, the pirates formed up to attempt two vicious raids against the humans of the Bay of Catazar. The first was an attempt to exploit the opportunity for Imperial fisherfolk to take advantage of an unexpected boom in marine life. The second saw pirates and slavers descending on the relatively undefended people of the Isle of Zemress, intended to pillage the settlement and enslave the populace.

The Empire, for its part, was determined to take a stand against the raiders. With the Freeborn taking the lead, independent captains from all the Imperial nations resolved to send a clear message about who controls the Bay of Catazar.

FIRST GAIN THE VICTORY

THE DEFENCE OF THE FISHING FLEET IS A RESOUNDING
SUCCESS.

THE EVACUATION OF THE ISLE OF ZEMRESS IS A
RESOUNDING SUCCESS.

Slightly more than thirty Imperial ship captains committed to the protection of the fishing fleet. Over the last three months, these captains and their vessels faced down Grendel pirates while the civilian fisherfolk filled their nets in the deep waters of the Bay of Catazar. As near as the civil service can determine, not a single fishing boat has been lost to the orcs of the Broken Shore.

As a result, every fleet assigned to protect the fishing fleet receives the usual production for the privateering action, plus an additional 3 Crowns each paid by the grateful maritime alliance of business owners, fleet captains, and members of the Purple Sails. There has been a significant increase in trade in Feroz and Madruga, Sarvos and Tassato, Necropolis, and Redoubt, more ilium than usual has been sent to the private auction, and the Broken Shore Bounty will produce an extra 2 rings of ilium each season for the following year.

The people of the Isle of Zemress called to the Empire for aid, and fifty Imperial fleets answered that call. Thirty Freeborn vessels from across the nation swept in a daring raid deep into Grendel waters, supported by more than half a dozen Navarr, and a scattering of Highborn, Imperial Orc, Urizen, Varushkan, and Wintermark fleets.

Imperial ships penetrate the loose blockade around the Isle of Zemress and quickly reach the main settlement. Much of the population is already waiting in the village - preparing to fight the orcs as best they can. The ships quickly fill with refugees. There is enough space to take not only entire families, but their most precious possessions. The grateful islanders are even able to bring their goats, sheep, oxen, and chickens which are an important source of their wealth. Once everyone is aboard, Dhomiros Tevus i Zemress (the leader of the Isle of Zemress) sets fire to the village - they will not leave the homes they worked so hard to build for the Grendel to claim.

The Grendel quickly realise what the Empire is about, and opportunistic Grendel ships begin to try and pick off outlying vessels. A bloody naval battle unfolds at the mouth of the cove as the village of Zemress island begins to burn. The fighting is vicious and bloody, but in the end the Empire is able to punch through the Grendel, and escape the waters of the Broken Shore without major losses. In the end, the ships and their precious living cargo are deposited in Joharra, the great billowing rainbow cloths fluttering in their drying racks along the cliffs waving like flags of welcome.

MAKE THE BEST USE OF IT

THE FREEBORN ARE LOOKING TO THEIR SYNOD TO DECIDE WHERE THE ZEMRESS ISLANDERS SHOULD SETTLE

The people of the Isle of Zemress are safely delivered to Feroz and Madruga. There are several thousand of them all told, and for the moment they are concentrating on day-to-day survival. They are hard workers and not without means of their own so they have little difficulty finding employment. There is also a strong sense of community spirit among them, buoyed up by their daring rescue, and they are keen to prosper in their new home.

But that raises a significant question which to date has been overlooked. Perhaps some assumed that the Zemress Islanders would disperse across the Coast - but it is clear that they are dead set against that. Although they are grateful to the Brass Coast and the Empire for rescuing them - the only Imperial citizen that any of them know is Immeldar i Ezmara i Erigo, the priest sent by the Synod to minister to them. They are understandably eager to settle somewhere together - so that the members of their community can continue to support each other.

This does represent something of a challenge for the Brass Coast. They have been recognized as fundamentally Freeborn, and every islander seems likely to be descended from one of the Founders - they are the scions of the crew of the Kraken's Bane after all. But centuries of separation have wrought differences - there is something in the spirit of the Zemress island folk that is different. More than one Freeborn who spends time with them describes them as more like familiar cousins than brothers or sisters. Talking to them it is obvious that this distinction is something they are keen to preserve - they are clearly hoping that by remaining together they will be able to reestablish the principles that served them well on their island.

All of which is fine by itself, but the unavoidable truth is that wherever they do settle is just as likely to be as influenced by the Islanders as it is to influence them. The distinct character that makes the Brass Coast the greatest land in the Empire must grow if it is to encompass these new arrivals. The Islanders are truthful folks - but perhaps not quite so dedicated to brazen honesty as the Freeborn. Equally, the Freeborn prize Prosperity - but even they find the enthusiasm with which the Islanders face hard toil to be a little zealous.

All of which makes the matter of which territory the Zemress Islanders should settle in all the more pressing. The accepted wisdom is that this is a matter for Freeborn Assembly - everyone is looking to them for an answer - so a clear statement of principle would be sufficient to settle the matter.

Feroz

Feroz is home to some of the finest apothecaries on the Brass Coast, and its warm, humid climate is perfect for the cultivation of herbs. If the Islanders settled here, it would likely be to the benefit of the Vizier of the Incarnadine Satchel and the Keeper of the Spice Gardens alike, especially if they are encouraged to settle in Morajasse. Yet Feroz is also home to the Temple of Balo and the Black Bull, and it is hard to predict how they might react to Asavean visitors worshipping their peculiar deities openly - so it might be a good idea to keep them away from Oranseri, at least in the short term.

Madruga

Madruga of the Jewelled Isles is the most densely settled of the Freeborn territories. Scattered with small towns and villages, and with the great city of Siroc in the south. Zemress herself was born here, in the port-town of Calvos, among the vineyards of Calvos Sound. The Kraken's Bane itself sits on the dock there - certainly the Islanders will want to at least visit this touchstone from their shared past. Yet the Islanders might find a home raising herds among the insular families of the Great Grasses, or establishing an enclave in Siroc itself where their propensity for hard work could easily make them rich. Madruga is not without potential pitfalls however - after all, as the most cosmopolitan of the Freeborn territories it may present a challenge to a people who are used to knowing everyone around them by name, and their relation to them. Yet at the same time, it would significantly increase their exposure to the peoples of the Empire - for good or ill.

Segura

Despite their maritime origins, the Islanders seem to show little interest in the sea itself. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that had they maintained any sort of fleet they would likely have attracted the

attention of the Grendel much earlier. As such Segura might represent an obvious place to encourage them to settle. After all, the people of Zemress are not cowards - they will fight as hard as any Marcher to protect their homes if they believe that they can win - a trait that may come in useful given how vulnerable Segura is to invasion.

As a territory of rolling grass and dry plains, Segura offers them a luxury in short supply on the Isle of Zemress - space. The influx of citizens could also help revitalise a territory still struggling to recover from the conquest of the Lasambrian orcs - they could help rejuvenate Anozel or Crevado for example. Indeed, if they chose to settle in Crevado it is likely their first order of business would be stamping out any vestige of the heretics rumoured to prey on the desperate and the weak-willed there. Or they may look to Sobral Grasses or Yellow Chase, raising herds and establishing farms that could increase the prosperity of the entire territory - if not the nation as a whole.

Kahraman

Rugged Kahraman is rich, but with a wealth the people of the Isle of Zemress are not entirely familiar with. They are farmers rather than miners, and the families of Kahraman are noted for their argumentative and competitive nature. A large new family would no doubt cause some conflict, and see the established balance of power shift over the course of several seasons - but the Dhomirol of the Cinnabar Hills exists to help smooth disputes between the families here and may well be able to ensure a peaceful settlement. Once in place, the Islanders will look for work - and the mines and quarries are the obvious places to go to seek hard work. At the same time, though, the Jade Range is rich grazing ground for cattle - and the Islanders are adept at raising herds in much less welcoming conditions. Several thousand new ranchers could do much to improve the prosperity of the territory, which currently must import much of its food. As with Segura, of course, the presence of the Islanders may represent an advantage should the Jotun come down out of Liathaven or Lasambria again - especially if they are encouraged to settle in Braydon's Jasse in the shadow of Fort Braydon - and coincidentally on the border with the Marches, a people with whom they seem to share several characteristics.

COMMAND WINDS AND WEATHER

THE GRENDEL PIRATE FLEET HAS WITHDRAWN IN DISARRAY - THEY HAVE NOT BEEN SEEN SINCE.

It is difficult to estimate how many independent ship captains the Grendel have. Many of their ships are tied up in their armada, while others apparently find it more lucrative to trade with those foreign nations who will have them. Even these traders, however, are not above opportunistic piracy when the opportunity presents itself. All save the most foolhardy are believed to avoid the trading vessels of nations the Grendel Salt Lords have placed off limits - though Imperial ships remain fair game.

Whatever force caused the fleets to come together and act in unison against the Empire is clearly dissipated for now and there is no evidence of any further concerted attempt to bring them together and direct them against the Empire. The pirate ships are scattered and dispersed - though they remain a

constant threat to every vessel that plies the waters of the Bay of Catazar, but they have returned to being a threat for individuals to deal with... for now.

EMPTY HANDED

THE BOURSE, OF COURSE

IT'S NOT A STAR

Six weeks before the Anvil summit, word goes around Mitwold that a star has fallen near the Westmere. A few interested parties, landskeepers and beaters, turn up to the West Household to investigate it, but Steward West tells them all the same thing: her great-niece Ellie has taken it to Anvil to sell it for a fortune. The wealthier citizens question exactly what's meant by "a fortune", but the Wests of Westmere aren't wealthy folk.

Two weeks later, word goes around that it's not a star after all. It's a crystal of some sort, which must surely look star-like to a lass who's never left her farm before. It's not full of ilium... but it is full of magic. Specifically, it's full of Autumn magic, though its precise nature is a little mysterious. Somewhat inevitably, all kinds of preposterous claims are made for the item, that it can summon (or banish) the Lictors, that it contains a thousand pawns of Autumn mana, that it can serve as a powerful regio for performing an Autumn ritual. Calmer heads realize none of these are remotely credible, but more than a few are quite interested to find out what it can do.

Ellie West has been strongly advised to go first to the Bailiff of the Grand Market, a figure well-known around the villages and towns of Mitwold for overseeing the markets there. Surely he's a trustworthy fellow who can help her to find out how much it's worth and help her get into the Hall of Worlds, where she wants to let "all the clever wizards there" bid on it. She might prefer to let it go to a Marcher, but from what she's been heard saying on the trods, her heart is set on seeing the Hall of Worlds first.

LEGACY

House Magot is an old Dawnish house whose glory has been much reduced in recent generations. In the time of Emperor Ahraz, they were a powerful, well-respected house led by the famous enchanter Earl Celeste. The enchantress was in and out of Senate as the mood took her, as well as a confidante of archmages, grandmasters, and a notable supporter of the Freeborn Emperor. She was a popular and influential figure, but she went into seclusion shortly after Ahraz died. Thereafter her house encouraged those seeking a test of mettle to look elsewhere and their reputation dwindled with their numbers. Largely forgotten in modern times, many people simply assumed that Celeste had passed away.

It seems that the old enchanter still breathes and while she no longer has an interest in attending Anvil, she has not quite lost her interest in the matters of Dawn. She has written to the Dawnish egregore, Lady Griffinsbain, proposing to sell an ancient heirloom of her house. The artifact, a necklace, is said to have been made by Circe, called the Swan, a powerful enchantress from Dawn's pre-Imperial history using

ilium she acquired from the Brother of Wizards. Ritual magic might confirm the item's ancestry - but a simple detect magic shows it is imbued with is a more potent variant of a Circlet of Falling Snow.

Lady Celeste wishes to bequeath the necklace to the nation, but only on her terms, and at a price. She has asked Lady Griffinsbain to convene the troubadours of Dawn to see if they will raise the funds to purchase the item. Her suggestion is that the troubadours meet each year to choose someone worthy, whichever Dawnish citizen best exemplifies the glorious traditions of the nation, to bear the talisman for the year ahead. Her professed hope is that Circe's Necklace will thus become the birthright of the nation, rather than pass to any one individual. In this way she hopes it will serve to inspire a generation of new enchanters and enchantresses to glory.

Her offer is not completely magnanimous. She has set a price of 25 thrones for the artifact. She has instructed the egregore to refuse offers from any but the troubadours of Dawn. She will not sell to anyone else, and if they do not feel that this piece of history is worth such a price, then she will make other arrangements to dispose of it. But if the troubadours choose to raise the money before the end of the Winter Solstice then her steward will bring the necklace to the following summit - the Spring Equinox.

In addition, in the interests of full disclosure, she writes a warning that the necklace is under a curse of some kind. Apparently the curse is not as old as the necklace and is not fatal. Celeste believes the curse might well be lifted by the right individual, but such a thing has been beyond her.

LEAVES

As the Druj have over-run parts of Zenith, many magicians have been forced to destroy their life's work to prevent it falling into the hands of their enemy. Once such group is the Spire of the Dark Moon. The most notable thing about the Dark Moon was the tea-house operated by the magician Seneca. In addition to the fine teas produced there, it was known for brewing a potent tea, like tranquil nostrum, but more powerful. The recipe for this tea was jealously guarded by Seneca, but was known to need rare herbs grown in his garden with the aid of night magic provided by the silent gardener, a herald gifted to him by the Brother of Wizards.

It is certain that the Druj would have taken a keen interest in the garden - they are known to seek out herbal lore and troves of herbs, so Seneca destroyed the garden and everything in it before he fled. Sadly he was caught and killed by the Druj while fleeing but it seems though that the Brother of Wizards is not content to leave the matter there. Sadogua has indicated that he will offer the same aid to whichever representative of the tea-houses offers him the most dragonbone for his consumption. There is some expectation that this opportunity may be of particular (but not exclusive) interest to the Lumis teahouse in Wintermark, the New Promise Cartel tea-house in the Brass Coast run by the i Sharth and i Zaydan families; the Freeborn Gilded Leaf Teahouse; the Bitterbark tea-house in Navarr; Holbucks in the League; and of course the Sentinel's Repose in Urizen - among others.

The winning tea-house will be able to allocate the Silent Gardener to a single herb garden of their choice - enhancing its production accordingly. In addition they can choose a single citizen to learn how to brew the rare tea perfected by Seneca, provided they have the mental wherewithal to learn how to master the recipe

SECURING THEIR FUTURE

Youngtongue, an orc apothecary of the Great Forest Orc tribe and his briar companion are coming to Anvil. They have a small collection of potions that they have been given leave to sell, and an artisan item that they brought themselves. Both the potions and the item once belonged to Youngtongue's brother who was killed fighting the Druj when the tribe fled the Barrens. Experienced apothecaries who have examined the potions confirm that they have not seen anything like them before - it is possible that the potions are not known in Imperial Lore. The crystal has been briefly examined and appears to be something that can be used to allow Heralds to pass more easily from the realms into these lands given the right circumstances. Again, the secret of its manufacture appears to be unknown to Imperial artisans.

The pair are intent on seeking out the Dredgemaster of Feverwater first, as they seemed convinced that this individual will be able to help them secure the best possible prices. They are expected to arrive late on Saturday morning of the Equinox.

WINTER MARKET

As the nights close in and the snow grows thicker, Varushkans look to provision for the winter. The larger vales set up elaborate winter markets, where all manner of goods are traded as everyone tries to make sure they have what is needed to get through the harsh winter ahead. All sorts of people can arrive at the Winter Market, old acquaintances from neighbouring vales, or strangers from a forgotten mining settlement. But the hearth magic of Varushka binds them all; if you treat someone as a trader a trader they will be compelled to act like one.

Once the hard business of buying and selling is done for the day, and the wards have been raised, then the Night Market begins. Story tellers, dancers, all sorts of entertainment, long into the night. For some years now the Varushkans have extended their winter market tradition to Anvil. In Anvil the goods for sale may be less likely to get you through the winter as to get you through lunchtime, but as the daylight fades who knows what you will find?

The Winter Market takes place in Varushka starting at 4pm and running on into the night.

HOW DO WE FIX THINGS

Since the Imperial Bourse crash last Winter Solstice, there has been an increasing amount of concern in some quarters about the economy. While the Throne managed to prevent the Senate budget going into actual deficit - the point at which armies, resources and the like risk being disbanded - the structural issues which brought the Empire so close to financial collapse still exist. In response, Navarr senator Llewellyn Leafstalker has called together representatives of the nations, Imperial Synod, Imperial Military Council, Civil Service and other august bodies for an Imperial Conference on Economics. Three expert speakers will be followed by open debate on how the Empire is to manage its economy.

The representatives of the Bourse have not yet been invited. This is because its representatives are to be chosen in the traditional way - in the public auction on Friday night at 8PM. Anyone wishing to represent the Bourse - or any other interest - can bid on a ticket then. Senator Leafstalker has announced that half of all proceeds are to be donated to a Marcher cause chosen by Merrick's. The conference itself is to be

held in Merrick's community hall, in the Marchers, at 5PM on Saturday, "or whenever we get out of Senate."

MORE LOVE, LESS PAPERWORK

BUTCHER'S MAIL

The Butcher's Bank of Temeschwar has facilitated trade throughout the League and beyond for over a hundred years. From humble roots offering small loans exclusively to the literal butchers of Temeschwar, it soon diversified and expanded its banking services. Today, the Butchers Bank has an excellent reputation as a sound, secure and trustworthy institution, with several previous Masters of the Butchers Bank appointed as Master of the Imperial Mint.

The current Master of the Butchers Bank, and Treasurer of the Bloody Butchers of Temeschwar, is the famous (and sometimes infamous) Merchant-prince Lorenzo "La Volpe" Macelliao von Temeschwar, who has been at various times custodian of the Fortress of Salt, overseer of the Regario Dossier, and Civilian Commissioner for the League. His recent building works have put his name - and the name of his Guild - to the lips of citizens in all four League cities, wherever rich, influential, or ambitious, individuals gather together.

Work nears completion on the Bloody Red Roads that will link the entire League together like never before. A grand Colossus broods over the port of Sarvos, drawing sightseers from across the civilised world. Three of the League cities now have "blood red" structures that serve as places of pilgrimage, celebrating what it means to be a League citizen. All these projects - and many others - can be traced back to the deep pockets and limitless ambition of La Volpe - the Fox of Temeschwar.

BLOOD RED RECOGNITION

THE VARIOUS MONUMENTS TO PRIDE BUILT BY LA VOLPE
INSPIRE MORE THAN A SINGLE VIRTUE, AND THE LEAGUE
ASSEMBLY MAY EMBRACE THAT.

The Bloody Great Theatre in Temeschwar (or the Grand Temeschwari Theatre if you want to be official); the Blood Red Quays art gallery in Sarvos, and the Blood Red River museum in Tassato are intended to serve as monuments to the Pride of the League.

Some visitors have argued, however, that these great works are not places of pilgrimage for those Proud of the works of the League, but monuments to the Ambition of Lorenzo "La Volpe" Macelliao von Temeschwar. Others disagree - they clearly celebrate the Prosperity of the Bloody Butchers guild; or they represent an unmistakable expression of Loyalty - giving to the nation without desiring recompense.

Regardless, the tenor of the conversation is that these structures are not solely about Pride - or rather that by inspiring Pride, they inspire the people of the League to be Ambitious, Prosperous, and Loyal - because that is what it means to be a citizen of the League.

The works of Lorenzo "La Volpe" Macelliao von Temeschwar stand as testaments not to a single virtue, but to everything it means to be part of the League. The Imperial Synod sends named priest with 25 doses of liao to encourage individuals across the League to embrace the inspiration of the Bloody Butchers; where others build cities, we build our nation."

Synod Mandate, League Assembly

If the League national assembly successfully passes this mandate then the Blood Red Quays, the Blood Red River, and the Bloody Great Theatre will become places that inspire the people of the League regardless of their attitude to the Virtues. They will divide their additional votes in the Synod and their additional liao to any League priest whose congregation is in that territory, regardless of dedication.

Furthermore, if Lorenzo is recognised as an inspiration to the League in this fashion, then for the next year there will be an opportunity to construct a similar great work in Holberg - provided it's construction is overseen by Lorenzo in the same manner as the other three (an art gallery, museum, or performance space appropriate to the League with the same unmistakable stamp of La Volpe, his virtue, and his guild).

As with the other places of pilgrimage, building the structure would require a commission, 15 wains of white granite, 5 wains of weirwood, and require 5 Thrones for labour. The structure would take three months to complete, it would provide a pool of 30 votes in the Imperial synod and 15 additional liao spread among the congregations in Holberg overseen by priests of the League

BLOOD RED ROADS

The first leg of the project to build highways linking League cities is nearing completion.

Perhaps the most ambitious work that La Volpe has initiated is the scheme to build great roads linking the four League cities - the Blood Red Roads. They are currently due to be completed at the Spring Equinox 382YE, and in addition to linking the League cities together they will also bring prosperity to the territories through which the roads pass.

As the roads near completion, their presence is already drawing attention. Some businesses are relocating to take advantage of the swift transit routes they represent, while newly come-of-age citizens or those seeking a change in circumstance are choosing to start new concerns in places the roads pass through, knowing that they will see a steady stream of customers.

The roads represent a massively ambitious undertaking, on a scale not really seen in the Empire since the time of Empress Aenea, the Builder. After two years work is very nearly complete ... on the first leg at least. Lorenzo's next stage is to extend the roads even more, to connect Mitwold, Hahnmark, Miaren, Karov, and Madruga (or more properly the cities of Meade, Kalpaheim, Seren, Delev, and Siroc). While

Lorenzo himself may not be an exemplar, the roads (and his various other projects) can still be seen as exemplary - the kind of deeds that a future exemplar might undertake.

The Blood Red Roads will connect the people of the Empire and make them stronger. This project is one of the most Ambitious in Imperial history. It demonstrates the Benevolence of Lorenzo “La Volpe” Macelliao von Temeschwar, and will stand as a lasting Legacy. We send named priest with 25 liao to encourage the faithful to aid in this endeavour.

Synod Mandate, General Assembly

If the General Assembly passes this mandate, then over the next season a number of faithful will join the engineers and roadbuilders working on the project, greatly speeding the final leg of construction. Rather than being completed for the start of the Spring Equinox 382YE, the roads will be completed just before the Winter Solstice 381YE. Furthermore, if this mandate were successfully raised and executed, there may be further opportunities to encourage Imperial citizens to assist in the completion of the second phase of the project.

A fly in the ointment

There is one potential obstacle that cannot be overcome by any amount of engineers, roadbuilders, or priests. The Druj have invaded Semmerholm. The Bloody Red Roads run - or rather ran - through The Gate to reach Holberg. After destroying that fortification, the orcs have largely withdrawn - but this still places one leg of the roads in a precarious position. If the Druj conquer Estmure, they will effectively cut Holberg off from the rest of the Empire - which will likewise cut them off from any benefit the roads would provide and could also, potentially, remove or reduce the economic benefits felt in Semmerholm itself.

The link to Holberg is being endangered by the Druj - if they take the region, Holberg will lose the benefits of the BRR even before they are completed.

BLOODY GREAT STATUE

La Volpe's final major construction effort is the Colossus of Sarvos - a seventy-five foot stone statue on a granite plinth twenty-five feet high. It is apparently built in the shape of the First Butcher (the founder of the Butchers' Bank of Temeschwar) - although anyone who has ever met him knows that it looks considerably more like Prince Lorenzo “La Volpe” Macelliao von Temeschwar than anyone else. Ironically many residents of Sarvos have begun to mistakenly believe it is in fact a statue honouring Aldones di Sarvos, the renowned paragon of Ambition. In the end, it hardly matters - it is a truly inspirational structure.

If the League assembly passes either of the previous mandates then another opportunity becomes available. It would also become available in the event that one of the virtue assemblies of Ambition, Loyalty, Pride, or Prosperity were to recognise Lorenzo as an exemplar (or as a paragon, of course).

In the event the mandate were passed by the Assembly, it would immediately become possible to pass a further mandate.

Lorenzo Macelliao von Temeschwar is a true inspiration, and the colossus of Sarvos serves as an inspiration to the virtuous people of the League. The Imperial synod sends named priest with one dose of true liao to consecrate the colossus to the virtue of (Ambition, Pride, Loyalty, or Prosperity) in recognition of its inspirational nature.

Synod Mandate, League Assembly

If the League national assembly were to pass this mandate, the named priest would be able to consecrate the Colossus with a dose of true liao. While the spiritual effects of consecrating such a large structure are likely to be minimal in the grand scheme of things, with the use of a dose of precious true liao, those who visited the statue could not fail to be swayed by its power.

The immediate effect would be to greatly increase the influence of the Colossus, increasing the bounty of coin the great work provides to the businesses of Sarvos from 900 rings to 1350 rings each season. It would also secure the statue's status as a true wonder of the known world.

This would not count as an inspirational tomb - Lorenzo is still very much alive and presumably has many more ambitious projects to undertake - but would ensure that his renown spread quickly though the Empire and beyond. In the event of his death, it is likely the colossus will become a place of pilgrimage for those seeking to learn more about the League, the Empire, or the virtues.

LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunities to speed the completion of the Blood Red Roads, and to declare the various theatres and museums as inspirational to the people of the League is only available during the Autumn Equinox. The opportunity to consecrate the Colossus of Sarvos is available as soon as the prerequisites are met (even if that does not happen during the Equinox), and remains available until the situation changes in some fashion.

THE MOTHER OF MORALITY

THE IRON HELMS

The Iron Helms, the infamously cruel Varushkan army continue to be divisive. The Wintermark and Freeborn Assemblies have unambiguously rejected them - even taking steps to make it harder for the army to fight alongside them. Likewise, the priests of the League have spoken out against the use of cruelty and fear on the battlefield - although their assembly was far from united in that condemnation.

Several significant opportunities have arisen as a result of the Synod's ongoing discussion of what is, or is not, too high a price to pay for victory.

GAZE INTO THE ABYSS

The Wintermark nation assembly may promote a change of strategy towards the Jotun, encouraging heroism rather than slaughter.

The priests of the Wintermark assembly have dispelled any doubt that they consider the actions of the Iron Helms are unvirtuous and beneath the heroic warriors of the Mark. First Ylmiska Ferbow passed a statement of principle calling them unvirtuous, then Gunnbrand Ironwill openly condemned them for their actions. As a result of this mandate, the Iron Helms will now be shunned when on campaign with any Wintermark army. It won't stop their butchery, not if their general orders it, but without the support of their fellow soldiers they will suffer a penalty to their effectiveness making it harder for them to win battles and conquer territory.

Perhaps as a result the Helms have turned tail and left the west, heading to Sarvos and presumably from there on to face the Grendel or the Druj. Many Winterfolk welcome this decision - "let the monsters kill each other" appears to be the common sentiment. "When the Varushkans emerge from the Labyrinth they will have a chance to be born in Wintermark where they can learn to become real heroes."

Still the actions of the Iron Helms in the Mournwold cannot be undone. The Jotun have always faced off against Wintermark, since as long as anyone can remember. They have even fought beside Wintermark in the past - in the reign of Emperor Guntherm warriors from the two nations even joined forces for a short time to fight the Thule...

Now they have fled the Mourne with their tails between their legs. It seems like a great victory - but some of the mystics mutter that there is a price to be paid for such a hollow triumph. They remind those who listen that Wintermark warriors once fought the Jotun as heroes - not butchers. At that time the Jotun would return the respect the Wintermark warriors showed them. Those days are gone now... but perhaps if Wintermark took a stand they might come again.

It is clearly a risk, but the Wintermark Assembly could choose to authorize a named priest to spread the following mandate.

A hero's tale ends with a good death - for us or our enemies. We send named priest with 25 liao to urge our warriors to face the Jotun on the battlefield as heroes, and strive with every sinew for victory, not for slaughter. Thus will we let the grimnir of either side treat their fallen.

Wintermark National Assembly

If the Wintermark Assembly passes this mandate then for the next year (until the start of the Autumn Equinox 382YE) any Wintermark army that fights the Jotun will gain 10% more victory points but inflict 20% less casualties. The change of tactics that ensures this reduction of casualties will be apparent to everyone present in the territory where the campaign takes place.

A HUNDRED TIMES TOO SHORT

The National Assembly of the Brass Coast may encourage the Red Wind Corsairs to embrace the idea of capturing, rather than killing, enemy soldiers, permanently changing their quality.

Like Wintermark, the Freeborn Assembly did not stint in their criticism of the Iron Helms. The statement of principle by Mazo i Zabala i Erigo made clear that such tactics as the Helms employed were unvirtuous and that the Freeborn should "aspire to be better than this and lead by example". The following season the Assembly authorized Constanza i Kalamar i Guerra to spread a mandate encouraging every Freeborn soldier to follow their conscience and disdain and shun the Helms, rejecting them and their cruelty.

Their words find ready ears among the Freeborn, although perhaps it is more than just virtue. The Varushkans are by their nature a dour folk and the Iron Helms in particular are a grim-faced lot. Few Freeborn weep any tears at the thought of charging the sour-faced schlacta a throne or more to join them at their table. Let the Helms debase themselves bringing death to their enemies - in the Brass Coast people revel in adventure - in a life lived to the full. Life is too short — it should never be dull.

For those who enjoy hearing tales of the corsairs, there is also another truth. Slaughtering your enemies... putting their heads on spikes... it might win a war... it will certainly kill your enemies... but it won't make you rich! To the victor should go the spoils - there is money to be made in war - just not from butchery. Dead men pay no ransoms.

So why not let the Freeborn set a real example for the Empire? A way to show everyone that the Empire can triumph on the field of battle - fight their enemies with honour - and still turn a tidy profit. If the Synod takes this view then they could authorize a named priest to spread the following mandate.

All things can have a price. We send named person with 25 liao to remind people of their prosperity as well as their courage and to take a ransom from those foes we defeat rather than count their bodies. We will fill our souls with virtue and our pouches with coin!

If this mandate is spread then the message will be eagerly taken up by the Red Wind Corsairs. Of all the Freeborn forces, the Corsairs more than any other epitomizes the Freeborn approach to life. They take a joy in their own life, rather than seeking to end the lives of others. Crucially though, many see battle as a chance to seize the wealth of their enemies. To them the point of war is to increase your affluence at the expense of your enemies, rather than to see them dead. After all, have the Red Wind (and the Wolves of War) not just demonstrated the value of a well-planned raid against an enemy's money-pouch in Spiral?

The mandate will build on and reinforce earlier messages - that the Varushkan approach to war is unvirtuous - and instead encourage the Freeborn to embrace their instinct to treat their defeated enemies with respect and take their money not their lives. The army's quality will be changed to Daring. Instead of the plunder order, the army will be able to submit the daring raid order. Although some Wintermark armies find fighting alongside a foraging army distasteful - many Wintermark heroes prefer the idea of ransoming defeated enemies to butchering them and have no reason to dislike a daring army.

DARING RAID

Casualties inflicted by this army are reduced by three tenths.

Casualties suffered by this army are reduced by a tenth.

The army generates wealth based on the number of victory points generated.

The army concentrates on lightning attacks against the enemy forces intended to take key strategic points and capture prisoners in the process. Defeated enemies are treated with respect and healed, but kept as prisoners to be ransomed back to the enemy. By such a means members of the army will grow wealthy; a portion of this bounty in the form of potions, magic items, money, herbs, crystal mana, crafting materials and valuable materials such as weirwood, mithril, white granite, and ilium will be claimed by the army general.

WIPE THE BLOOD OFF US

The League National Assembly can use mandates to support their statement of principle regarding the danger of embracing fear as a weapon.

During the Summer Solstice, the priests of the League narrowly passed a judgement condemning the cruelty of the Iron Helms. The priests were far from united in their condemnation - the statement only just managed a lesser majority - but it was successful, and in the current climate that is enough to have some impact. Of course the assembly may wish to repudiate the statement and embrace cruelty and fear - but if they are happy with their decision then there are ways to demonstrate their commitment to their principles.

In Pursuit Of The Goal

The League assembly may choose to pass a mandate urging their soldiers to show their disdain for the Iron Helms and their cruel ways. If this mandate is passed, then regardless of what orders are given by

the generals of the Military Council the soldiers of the League will acknowledge the unvirtuous nature of the Iron Helms. They will shun them, or refuse them comfort or aid when they campaign together.

The cruelty of the Iron Helms is unvirtuous, it demeans our Empire to use such tactics and it betrays the ideals of our people to fight alongside those who do so. The assembly sends X with 25 doses of liao to urge our soldiers to reject the Iron Helms and their cruelty."

Synod Mandate, league national assembly

If this mandate is enacted then for the next year, if the Iron Helms are deployed in a territory alongside the Wolves of War or the Towerjacks, , they will suffer a reduction of one tenth in the number of victory points they contribute to that campaign. This bonus is cumulative for each additional nation (not individual army) that has passed this mandate that are present in the territory.

Close To The Flowers

Alternatively, the League national assembly may look to the Throne for inspiration. While the Imperatrix tends to the entire Empire, she is a daughter of Holberg, and thus the League. The League national assembly may choose to pass the following mandate.

It is not enough to denounce the cruel; we must set an example that inspires others to eschew the false virtue of fear. The League assembly sends X with 50 doses of liao to urge the Wolves of War to seek allies prepared to embrace the vision of Imperatrix Lisabetta and preserve life, rather than embrace fear.

Synod Mandate, league national assembly

If the League passes this mandate it will automatically incorporate the effects of the first mandate urging the soldiers of the League to shun the Iron Helms - but in addition it will permanently allow the Wolves of War to add the physick quality to the list of qualities they can select from as a mercenary army, representing recruiting Holberg physics, Navarr apothecaries, and Highborn herbalists to support the army and their allies

THE PARENTS OF SECURITY

A LEAGUE OF OUR OWN

THE SHIPS OF SARVOS

A unique opportunity to build a powerful Naval Arsenal in Sarvos - and potentially a League navy.

During the reign of Emperor Barabbas there was a great deal of Imperial interest in naval matters, and the League was no exception. Sarvos is a centre for maritime trade - foreign vessels throng the docks and a great many Guilds have interests in shipping and international commerce. Following the Grendel attack, a scholar repairing some of the damage to Dora University came across a set of plans, apparently drawn up by Francesca "Franky" di Sarvos, for a grand project to militarise the Sarvos docks. The plans would require some minor modifications to take into account developments such as the Colossus and the new Cavabianca Dock - but such work is easily undertaken.

The Sarvos Arsenal and Dockyard would consist of a squat white granite bastion and a set of quays and drydocks designed specifically for constructing and maintaining warships. Similar to a shipyard, it would allow a navy to be raised - but anyone could build a shipyard in Sarvos. There is more to the Sarvos Arsenal and Dockyard. The League cannot currently maintain a third army - but with the support from the citizenry it could support a navy using the Arsenal - especially one raised with the intention of protecting the city, or paying the Grendel back for their cowardly sneak attack.

The Arsenal would require 100 wains of white granite and 30 wains of weirwood - it is much easier to re-purpose the docks of Sarvos than to build them from scratch, so the weirwood requirement is not especially great. Labour would require 260 crowns, and construction would take six months. The Naval Arsenal would require an upkeep of 15 Thrones each season. When it was complete, it would offer the following benefits.

Firstly, it would function as a great port, providing a share of 900 rings to every fleet operated by a League citizen in Sarvos.

Secondly, it would provide refuge to any Imperial navy that put-to-port in Sarvos.

Thirdly, it would allow naval construction to take place, just as a shipyard does, following all the normal rules.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it would allow the League to raise and maintain an Imperial navy, the core of which would be supported by the maritime guilds of Sarvos. As long as the region of Cigno remained under League control, they would be able to support the navy, regardless of what other territory they might gain or lose. If they lost control of Cigno, however, the navy would be assumed to have insufficient supply and begin to deteriorate.

At the moment, there is some enthusiasm among the Guilds of Sarvos for the Arsenal and Dockyard, but that may not last much beyond the end of the year - memories can be short in the League - so the opportunity to commission this construction is available only until the end of the Winter Solstice.

A CHAIN AGAINST CHAINS

An opportunity to construct a great fortification to protect the city of Sarvos from future Grendel invasion

The Arsenal of Francesca di Sarvos is not the only large-scale building project being discussed in the city, however. When the Grendel invaded, they did as little damage to the actual city as they could. It was not until the nights of rage, under the peculiar chaotic fog, that there was much actual destruction of property. In the months following the invasion, most of the destruction was repaired as the Sarvosans got on with their life. That said ... the ease with which the Grendel took control of the city still gives many of the residents nightmares. As a port city, Sarvos is very vulnerable to attack from the sea. Rebuilding is all very well, but when an armada of orcs could invade at any moment ...

Representatives of the Sarvos Chamber of Commerce have been in discussion with Menno Van Ritsjhof, perhaps the most skilled siege architect in Holberg. He has prepared a design for a grand fortification to protect Sarvos - a series of walls, towers, and barracks, coupled with great iron chains attached to blocks of white granite that can be raised or lowered to provide a nigh insurmountable obstacle to naval forces.

The fortification is ambitious and will not be cheap. To bring his vision to life will require 130 wains of white granite and 32 Thrones 4 crowns in labour costs. Construction would require a year to complete ,and obviously require a commission from the Imperial Senate. It would have an upkeep of 10 Thrones each season. The resulting fortification would have an effective strength of 3,000 against any conventional land forces invading Sarvos, or against any Shore Offensive in Bocche or Uccelini. Against any shore offensive aimed at capturing Cigno, however, the fortification would resist conquest with an effective force of 6,000

COLD WELCOME, DARK MIRROR

An opportunity to encourage League citizens to support their armies - by condemning the armies of Varushka.

The Iron Helms are spending the Summer in Sarvos, giving the people of the League a chance to get a good look at them. Many citizens, bearing in mind the words of Cesare Enzo Di Trivento, supported by the League Assembly, do not like what they see. The Varushkans are seen as boorish, insular, peculiar, unfriendly, and in many cases their attitudes suggest they have more in common with the barbarians than the refined people of Sarvos. Indeed, some wags suggest that by comparison the Grendel made better guests.

The fact that the Iron helms are there to protect the city is fair enough - but there are also many stories of the atrocities committed by the Iron Helms in the Mournwold. It does not help that a lurid pamphlet claiming to depict the true events of the arrest of Dogri Thulebane begins to circulate shortly after the Summer Solstice - and it is quickly joined by numerous other cheap, thrilling publications ascribing all sorts of strangeness to the Varushkan army. Worse, when a brawl breaks out in a drinking house in the

northern part of the city between a band of bravos, a half-dozen off-duty Varushkan schlacta, and a work-gang of College orc longshoremen, the tale rapidly spreads across the city and is wildly exaggerated with every street it crosses. The magistrates never get to the bottom of who started the brawl, but it leaves an inn ruined, blood on the cobbles - and the Iron Helms with a most-likely unjust reputation for savagery and anti-orc bigotry.

Several prominent citizens compare the Iron Helms very unfavourably with the popular Wolves of War and the Towerjacks, echoing the words of the League Assembly. There is a lot of murmuring and grumbling about what these uncouth northerners are doing in Sarvos - would they not be happier in Temeschwar perhaps?

The Iron Helms use the malign spiritual power of fear. That the Varushkans are prepared to use such a weapon speaks poorly of their entire nation. The Imperial Synod sends (named priest) with 50 doses of liao to remind the people what a virtuous army looks like - and urges them to shun the unvirtuous northerners and save their favour for the Wolves of War and the Towerjacks instead.

Synod Mandate

If the League national assembly successfully raises this mandate, and sends a named priest with at least 50 doses of liao to spread the word, it will have a permanent effect, encouraging the League citizens to support their own armies.

Any League army that receives natural resupply in a League territory will recover an additional 100 strength each season (150 if the army is large). This represents the support of the wealthy citizens of the League for their armies.

By contrast, any Varushkan army that attempts to receive natural resupply in a League territory receives only four-fifths the amount they would normally expect. The Iron Helms, specifically, will instead receive half the normal amount of natural resupply.

THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

The orc slaves liberated from Jarm have graduated from the College

The College of the Liberated was commissioned by the Imperial Senate in Winter 379YE to deal with an influx of orcs from the Principalities of Jarm. In the nearly two years since, most of the orc students who have passed through its doors have moved on, one way or another. Today, the college provides education and apprenticeships to the poor and disadvantaged of Sarvos - and by doing so thereby increase the productivity of every business in the territory.

Of the three hundred or so freed slaves who came to the Empire from Jarm, only around a third remain in Sarvos, Some still live in Trivento, but most have been lured to the Jewelled City itself. Despite their time at the college, many struggle to compete with professional League citizens who have enjoyed more education and greater opportunities. While some are able to hold jobs as assistants to shopkeepers, most have ended up as labourers of one type or another - farmhands, dockworkers, miners, drovers. There are

even a very few nasty rumours that at least one old-style "fighting pit" has been reopened somewhere in Caricomare, with orc gladiators providing the main attraction as they did in the bad old days before the Orc revolt.

Part of the problem has been caused by the sack of Sarvos, a mere three months after work on the College was completed. The Jarmish orcs are often treated with suspicion by citizens of Sarvos, concerned that they may be more inclined to support the Grendel than their human benefactors. There seems to be little basis for this prejudice - after all, there were no College orcs in Sarvos during the time of the invasion - they were all still in Trivento. There have been a handful of violent incidents of violence aimed at the newcomers, but for the most part the prejudice is less obvious.

It is no surprise, then, that two-thirds of the orcs educated at the College have chosen to move elsewhere. Most take the long overland trip to Skarsind, looking to find new lives for themselves. Ironically, they have little difficulty finding employment there. Many are more than happy to work in the mines the Imperial Orcs eschew, and several have ended up in positions of reasonable responsibility working for the Foreman of the Mines of Gulhule. Others find the skills learned in their apprenticeship in the League to be rare among the Imperial Orcs, and settle into comfortable positions running or helping to run businesses - such as those associated with Torfast Trading Post. College orcs settling in Skarsind invariably bond to the Imperial Orc egregore, and set about industriously building new lives for themselves and their families.

As a result, Marcello's words have polarised opinion somewhat in Sarvos. Those already predisposed to view the College orcs as citizens make more of an effort to help them improve their status in the League. Those already suspicious of the orcs point to the possibility of Grendel orcs among them, and grumble. Most people don't care one way or another of course - this is Sarvos and there are more important things to worry about - but discussion between the two opposed sides is becoming more heated.

LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunity to build a Naval Arsenal remains as is until the end of the Winter Solstice 381YE, after which it will need to be re-evaluated. The opportunity to build a grand fortification is not time sensitive - the plans exist. The opportunity to convince the citizens of the League to support their own armies at the expense of Varushkan armies is only available during the Autumn Equinox while memories of the Iron Helms and the recent mandate are fresh in peoples' minds.

THE PLACE YOU CALLED HOME

GREAT FOREST ORCS

THE TREATY

THE TRIBE OF THE GREAT FOREST WILL LIVE AS GUESTS OF THE EMPIRE IN THERUNIN, PRIMARILY CENTERED IN THE LOWER TARN VALLEY.

THE GREAT FOREST ORCS HAVE CHOSEN TO DISBAND THEIR ARMY.

When the Great Forest Orcs left the Barrens, they came as a people fleeing the Druj with a greatly depleted army. They sought an alliance with the Empire hoping for a home with the Navarr in Therunin. Initially they hoped that the Empire might grant them a region of their own in which to dwell. With such a homeland they could have begun to rebuild their army and be ready to retake their homeland in the Barrens.

Eventually it became clear that such a request was impossible. The Empire are prepared to allow the tribe to dwell within Therunin provided that they are willing to help defend it - but they will not cede a region the ancient forest. The orcs are clearly disappointed by the outcome, but their mood is one of resignation rather than anger. They seem to accept that in the end they simply asked for too much and offered too little.

Without a homeland, the survival of their army remains precarious. If the force were to face the Druj in such a state, then any significant losses would cause the army to break and be destroyed. Faced with such a threat the elders are forced to accept the inevitable and take action to protect what remains of their tribe.

In the weeks following the Summer Solstice, the orcs voluntarily disband their army, casting aside their war spears. Near half of the two thousand warriors ceremonially cast aside their role as warriors and defenders, and shift their focus toward building a new life for themselves and their people in Therunin.

THE SPEARS OF THE PINE

Even without an army, the tribe of the Great Forest maintains a cadre of warriors.

The Great Forest Orcs have named Chief Valack as their liason to the Imperial Military Council. He may be contacted by Winged Messenger at the Great Forest Encampment, Lower Tarn Valley, Therunin for the time being. Valack has sent messengers to inform the Military Council that he is creating a map showing the disposition of the Mallum as his people know it, and expects it to be ready for the Winter Solstice. These maps will not be sufficient to allow Imperial magicians to scry the territories, they are an outline at best, showing the names and locations of the Druj territories. They will make it easier for the Imperial Senate to build a spy network in the Mallum if they choose though. They also promise to deliver as much information as they know about the Druj armies - although Valak cautions that such information is several years out of date.

While the Great Forest Orcs have disbanded their army their warriors do not abandon their weapons or their armour. Half choose to maintain combat readiness, guarding their people from the dangers of the forest of Therunin - which is, after all, a Navarr territory. Giant insects, alligators, and the occasional vallorn spawn threaten the orcs just as they threaten their human neighbours. These warriors call themselves the Spears of the Pines.

Calling the Spears of the Pines

As long as relations between the Great Forest Orcs and the Navarr remain cordial, and the orcs continue to live in Therunin, any Navarr general who is fighting in Therunin can call for the Spears of the Pines to fight alongside them. If they do so, a band of orcs and briars with a fighting strength of 1,000 will fight alongside that general in the coming season. To call the Spears of the Pines, the general need merely mention that they are doing so in their orders. Further, if any Navarr army is fighting to conquer the Barrens, they may likewise call for the Spears of the Pines, again by mentioning the in their orders. The Great Forest Orcs will only fight alongside Navarr armies in this way.

For purposes of rituals such as Bound by Common Cause, a warband of Spears of the Pines qualifies as seven military units.

THE HOLT OF THE OAK

The tribe of the Great Forest offer to construct a fortification of weirwood in the Lower Tarn Valley, to help protect Therunin.

The fortification would require a Senate motion, 80 wains of weirwood and 20 thrones, take a year, and be garrisoned by the orcs.

The fortification would not count against the Empire's limited number of commissions, and would have no upkeep for the Empire as long as the orcs remained.

The Great Forest Orcs claim to have great skill working with wood and seem keen to put their skills in service to protect the Empire. They have offered to oversee the construction of an effective fortification, using weirwood rather than the traditional white granite. They propose that the fortification would be sited in the Lower Tarn Valley but stress that it would serve to protect the whole territory if it were attacked. If built, it would not only function as a fortification, but any Spears of the Pine who were not supporting a Navarr army would default to using the fortification.

Obviously they have neither the weirwood nor the money needed to build such a thing. But after some discussion the civil service confirm that they do possess a number of skilled builders and that the proposal is sound - architecturally at least. If the Senate were to grant legal permission and the senator who passed the motion provided 80 wains of weirwood and 20 thrones, then they could construct a fortification in the Lower Tarn Valley. Crucially, with the Great Forest Orcs able to oversee the construction, it would not need oversight by the Empire's engineers and thus would not count against the Empire's limit of commissions.

Although they cannot afford to build the Holt of the Oak, they can spare the warriors to garrison it, so the Empire would not need to support the fortification (saving 10 Thrones each season as long as the Great Forest Orcs continued to support it). While the treaty remained in effect, the fortification would be identical to any regular Imperial fortification in practical terms. Any Imperial military unit could still choose to support it in the same way as any other fortification built by an allied force in the Empire, but it would be occupied and defended by the Great Forest Orcs.

Such a plan is not without drawbacks. The Great Forest Orcs are adamant that the work will be a gift to the Navarr, when the Orcs leave for the Barrens once again. But it is the job of the civil service to consider what other eventualities might occur. If the treaty were broken and the Orcs were motivated to try and seize the Lower Tarn Valley... then any fortification controlled by them would take no part in the initial fighting. But if the worst happened and the Orcs did somehow manage to consolidate their control of the region then the fortification could be quickly turned against the Empire.

THE LODGE OF YEW

The Navarr National Assembly may encourage the herbalists and business owners of Therunin to offer aid to the tribe of the Great Forest.

Most of the Great Forest Orcs apothecaries and physics have been killed, lost in battle to the Druj (or in some cases the Dawnish). Those that survive have been forced to abandon their herb gardens to the Druj and now they have used every herb they possess to keep their people alive. Despite their best efforts, many of their people are still in need of medical treatment and without it they are unlikely to survive the coming winter. Some have attempted to buy what supplies they can from the Navarr who live in Therunin - but they lost what little wealth they once possessed when they fled the Barrens.

The sorry truth is that any Navarr herbalist who looks to trade with the Great Forest Orcs is certain to find themselves losing out as a result. These people simply do not have the means to pay for what they need - there is nothing to be gained from helping them. The sensible thing would be to leave them to their own business - most of them will survive and within a few years they should be established enough to prosper by themselves.

But a few guides point out that hoarding wealth is not part of Prosperity. They urge the Navarr Synod to consider the virtues and take action. At their request, the Imperial civil service calculate that the following mandate would be effective.

The Navarr assembly send NAMED PRIEST with 25 Liao to urge Navarr apothecaries, physicks and brokers to share what herbs they can spare with our guests and allies.

Synod Mandate

If this mandate is enacted, every herb garden in Therunin will produce two less herbs than normal (chosen randomly) for the next year and every business will produce 36 less rings. But the resulting generosity will be sufficient to ensure that no orc dies from wounds that might otherwise have been healed or for lack of herbs to treat them.

THE BOUNTY OF REIKOS

Following request by Yosef of the Shattered Tower, the civil service has prepared two additional opportunities, related to the suggestion that the people of Reikos could offer support to the Great Forest tribe. While the Highborn have traditionally had little to do with these orcs, the people of Reikos have a shared experience of being oppressed by the Druj.

One option would be for the Imperial Senate to pass a motion, similar to that used to distribute the contents of the Imperial Breadbasket, distributing the bounty of the Gardens of High Chalcis to the Great Forest Orcs. This would see the great work provide no benefit to the herb garden owners of Reikos for the next year, but would provide the orcs with a generous supply of herbs, more than enough to ensure that where no unnecessary deaths. This exceptional act of generosity, would also create an unrivaled opportunity for a closer relationship between the people of Reikos and the tribe of the Great Forest.

The Highborn assembly send NAMED PRIEST with 25 Liao to urge the apothecaries, physicks and benefactors of Reikos to offer charitable aid to the orcs of the Great Forest in Therunin.

Synod Mandate

Alternatively, the Highborn National Assembly could pass the above mandate to encourage the people of Reikos to offer succour to the Great Forest orcs – but after years of occupation the population of Reikos is still significantly lower than that of Therunin so the burden of charity will be more tightly focused. If enacted, every herb garden in Reikos will produce three less herbs than normal (chosen randomly) for the next year, and every business will produce 48 less rings. Though not as effective as redistributing the bounty of the Gardens of High Chalcis, the Great Forest orcs would still be supported allowing for the Highborn of Reikos to forge a better understanding with the Therunin tribe.

THE SONG OF THE GREAT FOREST

The tribe of the Great Forest have offered to work the Thimble for the Empire in return for a share of its bounty.

The Great Forest Orcs are expert tenders of weirwood trees. When they dwelled in the Barrens they worked the weirwood groves in the Heart of Peytaht producing a steady stream of valuable timber to help the Barrens. The Orcs speak fondly of these groves, it seems that they possess some value to them beyond the wealth of the trees themselves, and they long to take them back. For now though, that

resource languishes in the hands of the Druj - leaving these skilled craftsmen with no wood to work or work to perform.

Their shaman and totem-speakers have asked the Empire to consider the proposal that their woodcutters would work the trees in the Thimble for the Empire in return for a bounty of four wains of weirwood each season. Doing so would mean that the entire cost of running the Thimble would be negated while the agreement was in place - but the output of the grove would be reduced by four wains per season. They Orcs could then use the weirwood they gained to create herb gardens and similar of their own in Therunin.

A few kind brokers have tried to explain to the Great Forest Orcs that their offer isn't commercially viable. That the sale price of weirwood is higher than the value of their labour. To this the orcs have only shrugged. It's not clear if they fully understand the complex economics involved - or if they just don't care. Whatever the case they ask that the Empire consider their proposal.

The running of the Empire's bourse resources follows strict constitutional and legal rules. It would require a suitable Senate motion to authorize the Great Forest Orcs to work the groves and claim the timber - but due to the nature of the seat's election, such a motion could only be passed this season - so that any change took place while the Thimble was up for election at the Winter Solstice.

GUARDED WISDOM

The Imperial Conclave may choose to help the Great Forest orcs expand their understanding of magic.

The Great Forest Orcs lack skilled magicians and ritualists. In fact they possess only the most rudimentary magical training and some of their best magicians are barely a match for the children in the Academy. It appears that when they laboured under the Druj, what little magic they possessed was stripped from them. The Druj it seems will tolerate their subject tribes learning some of the more simple battle spells and little more. In total they have only a few dozen rituals - none of which surpass Imperial equivalents - most are far worse.

From interactions with the Navarr, they slowly become aware that the Empire's magical learning exceeds their own as the light of the sun exceeds that of a candle. They ask those magicians they talk to how they came by such mastery of magic and seem awed that the Empire has instituted schools and libraries to spread this learning across the land.

Eventually the inevitable question is put to the Navarr. Would the Empire consent to let the Great Forest Orcs access this great storehouse of knowledge and learning? Would they allow the young magicians of the tribe to learn what their own children learn? Could their shamans be allowed to access these mystical libraries?

The Great Forest Orcs clearly have no concept of what the Empire might charge for such a thing - but they scrape together all the wealth they can amass which amounts to 13 mana crystals, 7 ingots of Beggars Lye, and a single ring of Ilium. Apparently this great treasure has been in the tribe's possession for a generation - carefully hoarded away from the Druj. They offer this bounty in exchange for access to Imperial Lore while they dwell in Therunin.

There would be no financial cost to the Empire to grant access to their ritual magics, but the civil service advice caution. The Empire has a treaty with the Great Forest Orcs, but treaties have failed before now, especially in recent times. If the Orcs are granted access to Imperial Lore there is no way to limit what rituals they might acquire. While they are hardly likely to become the equal of the Urizen in a few short years... they are going to use that access to acquire rituals that they have never had access to before. Once that happens there is no simple way to take the lore back short of extermination. And worse, if the Orcs return to the Barrens... there might be nothing to stop the Druj enslaving them again - and taking that lore for their own - just as they did before.

To share Imperial Lore with the Great Forest Orcs would require a suitable Declaration of Concord by the Conclave. If successful, the bounty of mana crystals, lye and ilium could be the subject of a Declaration of Endowment at the next summit. In return the Orcs would gain access to many useful rituals such as Blessing of New Spring or similar that they could use to prosper as they settle in Therunin.

PRAISE AND BLAME

DEFINE “WARCRIME” EXACTLY

The Iron Helms, the infamously cruel Varushkan army continue to be divisive. The Urizen, Highguard, and Dawn assemblies have joined their voices with Navarr and Varushka in sanctioning the use of cruelty and fear on the battlefield.

Several significant opportunities have arisen as a result of the Synod's ongoing discussion of what is, or is not, too high a price to pay for victory.

THE SHADOWS OF OUR FEELINGS

By encouraging soldiers to be ruthless, Varushka, Navarr, Highguard, Urizen or Dawn, can gain the ability to put the enemy to the sword.

Imperial military armies are a disciplined force. When a general gives an order to attack, they can be confident that it will be carried out exactly as stated. Barbaric methods of war, torture, summary executions and the like have largely been eschewed by the Empire as uncivilized and unvirtuous. But not all hold such views and the Iron Helms show what can be achieved in war for those who are prepared to take the straightest path. Now the priests of Highguard, Dawn, and Urizen have joined Varushka and Navarr in passing statements of principle encouraging people to use whatever tools are needed to defeat their enemies.

As a result of these clear statements of principle, any of the national assemblies of Varushka, Navarr, Highguard, Urizen or Dawn could now choose to authorize a mandate enjoining their soldiers to slaughter the Empire's enemies wherever they can find them.

We send named priest with 50 doses of liao to exhort every Imperial soldier to slaughter our Empire's enemies with ruthless abandon.

National Assembly

The generals of any nation that spreads this mandate among their soldiers will gain the option to issue the ruthless onslaught attacking order. Encouraging Imperial soldiers to kill any enemy they can find will have a dramatic effect on any military campaigns that the Empire face. By cutting down those they face without mercy, by taking no quarter and leaving no sanctuary, the nation's soldiers will adopt a merciless but effective approach to warfare. Of course such tactics are not entirely without drawbacks. There are certain rules of warfare that are followed and if the Empire adopts these tactics then their enemies are bound to do likewise, killing enemy combatants rather than taking them prisoner.

RUTHLESS ONSLAUGHT

Casualties suffered by this army are increased by a fifth

Casualties inflicted by this army are increased by a fifth

This ruthless tactic is apparent to everyone present in the territory where it is taken.

Ruthless onslaught is as effective as balanced attack in claiming enemy territory and securing strategic objectives, but significantly increases the casualties inflicted by the army - as forces take every opportunity to slaughter their enemies. The drawback is that enemy forces tend to respond in kind, slaughtering every Imperial soldier that falls into their hands.

THAT WHICH DOES NOT KILL US

The National Assembly of Dawn may encourage the Eastern Sky to embrace bloodthirsty tactics, allowing an opportunity to permanently change their quality.

The Dawnish men and women of the Eastern Sky are all too familiar with the brutal work of the Druj barbarians and despise above all others. Traditionally they are first to see the carnage the cruel orcs leave behind when they encounter an Imperial village. Now a full scale Druj invasion is underway, the Towers of the Dawn and the Gate have fallen and Druj armies have conquered Axmure and threaten all of Semmerholm. As word comes that their manor houses burn, noble and yeofolk alike are thirsting for a chance to wet their blades in Druj blood. Why not let the marsh demons learn what fate their treachery has brought them?

Inspired by the example presented by the Iron Helms, the Dawnish synod has a chance to seize this moment to urge their soldiers to fight with unbridled fury. Thus they could authorize the following mandate.

We send named priest with 100 doses of liao to inspire the Eastern Sky to cast aside their scruples and repay the Druj in kind for their bloodthirsty assault.

Dawnish Assembly

If the Dawn assembly enact this mandate this season, then at the following summit, the General of the Eastern Sky can include instructions for their troops to focus on developing new tactics as part of their normal order submission. If the general can supplement this with 30 wains of mithril then the quality of the Eastern Sky will permanently shift from well loved to bloodthirsty, allowing them to issue orders to cut their enemies down. (The general should ensure the wains of mithril are in their inventory, then e-mail Profound Decisions after the event).

THE WORST OF ALL EVILS

The National Assembly of Highguard may encourage the Seventh Wave to seize every opportunity for revenge, allowing an opportunity to permanently change their quality.

Those who died when Reikos fell to the Druj might be considered the lucky ones. Those who survived faced a brutal occupation, condemned to a life of slavery at best, tortured and experimented on by the Druj herbalists at worst. Finally, the Druj were defeated and driven out - but the memories of the horrors they executed are not so easily erased. Now that Druj armies are once more threatening Imperial lands and lives, many Highborn soldiers yearn to take revenge on those who once despoiled their homeland. The Seventh Wave in particular could be encouraged to focus their efforts on revenge.

Driven by the memory of the sack of Reikos, the Highborn synod has a chance to seize this moment to urge their soldiers take revenge upon the Druj. Thus they could authorize the following mandate.

We send named priest with 100 doses of liao to inspire the Seventh Wave to take bloody vengeance on the Druj, and focus their efforts on slaughtering any of the enemy they can catch.

Highborn Assembly

If the Highborn assembly enact this mandate this season, then at the following summit, the General of the Seventh Wave can include instructions for their troops to focus on developing new tactics as part of their normal order submission. If the general can supplement this with 30 wains of mithril then the quality of the Seventh Wave will permanently shift from scouting to vengeful, allowing them to issue orders to seek every opportunity to make their enemies pay for their transgressions. (The general should ensure the wains of mithril are in their inventory, then e-mail Profound Decisions after the event).

THE MOUNTAINS OF TRUTH

The National Assembly of Urizen may encourage the Citadel Guard to abandon their mastery of cyclic magic in favour of powerful curses, allowing an opportunity to permanently change their quality.

There is no army in the world with the mastery of magic possessed by the Citadel Guard - not among the Thule who claim to rival the Urizen for the arcane arts, not even in Jarm whose magician-princes consort with eternal. Skill with magic is the highest art-form, and it is perfected here in the mountain spires.

Those spires are now threatened by the invasion of the Druj. Endsmeet has fallen and now the barbarians threaten the Halls of Knowledge in Zenith. The greatest minds of the Empire are being enslaved by a tribe

of orcs whose imagination is limited to the idea of using magic to kill people. If they want to fuck with us - perhaps it is time to show these animals what the real limits of magic are.

Incensed by the damage wreaked by the advancing Druj armies, the Urizen synod has a chance to seize this moment to urge their magicians to throw caution to the wind and unleash the full extent of their powers. Thus they could authorize the following mandate.

We send named priest with 100 doses of liao to inspire the Citadel Guard to unleash the full extent of our powers and rain death upon our enemies.

Urizen Assembly

If the Urizen assembly enact this mandate this season, then at the following summit, the General of the Citadel Guard can include instructions for their troops to focus on developing new tactics as part of their normal order submission. If the general can supplement this with 30 wains of mithril then the quality of the Citadel Guard will permanently shift from cyclic magic to arcane mastery, allowing them to issue orders to eviscerate all the opposing tribe. (The general should ensure the wains of mithril are in their inventory, then e-mail Profound Decisions after the event).

ARCANE MASTERY

CAN USE THE STORM OF CURSES ORDER WHEN ATTACKING

The army employs powerful curses of every realm, but primarily spring and winter to wreak havoc on their enemies, increasing casualties among their enemies and the civilian populations that give them succour. The curses employed are smaller scale localized magic, more focused than a territory wide effect. Thus the magicians will be able to direct them to minimize the impact on Imperial civilians - but the impact on enemy civilians will be devastating.

This quality incorporates all the benefits of the magic quality.

STORM OF CURSES

All casualties inflicted by this army are increased by one fifth.

The majority of enemy civilians in the regions attacked will be slain if they do not flee

The use of this order will be apparent to everyone present in the territory where the campaign takes place.

The Citadel Guard could develop localized curses designed to spread disease and death throughout the enemy. All enemy armies contain healers, physicians, apothecaries and similar allowing them some defence from such attacks. But the

effects on enemy towns and villages will be difficult to stop, most of them will die or be forced to flee.

SEALS AND STARS

GENERAL STUFF

STARS

THE STARS HAVE STILL NOT RETURNED TO THE NIGHT SKY
OVER MUCH OF THE EMPIRE.

As with previous seasons, the night skies over most the Empire (and several adjacent territories including Mournwold, Liathaven, and the Barrens) remain empty of stars. Naga living in those territories are subject to the shroud's peculiar influence ... and as Casinea (the location of Anvil) is still affected, any naga attending the summit will still begin to feel their natural urge toward subtlety and secretiveness is greatly strengthened. (OOC note: players are urged to read the Darkest night wind of fortune from the Spring event to refresh themselves as the details of this effect and bear in mind that the skies directly over Anvil also appear normal for some complicated and subtle reason).

The night skies are clear over Morrow, Spiral, Redoubt, Miekarova, and Skarsind. While the "empty sky" phenomenon has been removed from Zenith as well, Urizen inhabitants report that a Penumbra Veil has again settled over the territory - despite an earlier one having been removed during the Summer Solstice. The Druj, no doubt, looking to conceal their activities from Imperial magicians. (OOC Note: Naga living in those territories are free of the odd influence ... but obviously coming to the event means they will slowly start to fall under its sway again for the duration of their stay).

THORNS

IMPERIAL CITIZENS STILL LACK THE ABILITY TO ACCESS
SPRING REGIO.

Imperial citizens continue to find it impossible to call on the power of Spring regio. As with the Summer Solstice, no Imperial citizen can draw on the power of a regio to enhance their ability to perform Spring rituals. For purposes of performing Spring rituals, the Imperial regio at Anvil is considered to be a Spring regio.

Furthermore, no Imperial citizen can use the Imperial regio to target a Spring ritual at an Imperial territory, nor use a regio in a territory to invoke Spring magic to affect the entire territory. This has a profound impact on the ability of Imperial magicians to use rituals such as Foam and Spittle of the Furious Sea, Forge the Wooden Fastness, Rivers of Life, Rivers Run Red, Thunderous Tread of the Trees, Mountain

Remembers Its Youth, Thunderous Deluge, The Dance of Navarr and Thorn, and Hallow of the Green World. In effect, these rituals have become impossible to perform.

CITADELS

IMPERIAL MAGICIANS HAVE RAISED CASTLES ACROSS THE EMPIRE

The power to raise magical citadels in key areas of the Empire continues to be a valuable boon. Two icy citadels are conjured by the Blazing Sun coven of Highguard. One, raised in Clypion provides valuable assistance to the Highborn armies protecting Zenith against the Druj invaders. The other is raised on the slopes of Chalcis Mount, overlooking the slow rebuilding of the territory and standing mute guard against any potential for surprise invasion.

With the Empire still unable to access the full power of Spring magic, it seems that the Sussivari Frost Coven are working hard to take up any slack caused by the inability to perform Forge the Wooden Fastness. The Wintermark coven raises four citadels of coiling mist, shadow, and night magic to protect the Empire. In Ottermire, Grey Fens, in the Morass near Holberg, and amid the marshes of the Upper Tarn Valley, the power of night is invoked to grant protection against the Empire's enemies.

The Empire is familiar with these magical citadels, but a new power is brought to bear in the months since the Summer Solstice. Wielding a hitherto-unknown ritual named The Immaculate Architect, the Urizen Concordium of Pallas bind potent Autumn magic into the construction of the fortification being built in Broken Ride in Reikos. The powerful enchantment allows six months of work to take place in a scant twelve weeks, and sees the completion of the grand fortification there well ahead of schedule.

BLESSING OF THE HYLJE

The hylje have ceased their raids against northern Wintermark

As summer ends, and autumn approaches, there is a change on the shores of Atkonaroq. For nearly a year, the lake shore has been covered in the huts and tents of strange folk.

A few days after the Summer summit, however, they begin to break camp. On an unspoken signal, almost as one, they walk into the lake. There are more than a few curious fisherfolk watching and the sight they see they say they will remember forever. The lakefolk wrap their skins around themselves and, rippling and blurring, transform into the shape of large seals. At the forefront is a singular figure, his skin white with red striations. He leads the transformation, singing an achingly beautiful song of triumph as he leads his people beneath the waters of the lake.

Within a few hours, only a few smouldering fires and abandoned huts show any sign of their presence. There is no doubt in the minds of those that witness it that they have been in the presence of the hylje, ancient cousins of the Suaq people.

For the next three months, sightings of seals in the waters of Sermersuaq increase ten-fold. Fishing boats find their nets unusually full – as if fish were literally being herded into their nets by the seals themselves.

In the icy wastes, those who make a living hunting on the land find that the animals they hunt are noticeably plentiful - there are rumours of a strange figure dressed in a white sealskin speaking in an unknown tongue to a herd of mammoths, who duly walk slowly towards their death at the hands of the hunters. More than one sailor has a story of their ship being guided to calm waters and easy passages by the seals themselves. It seems the strange seal-folk of the northern wastes have seen fit to bestow their blessing on the people of Sermersuaq.

The blessing shows no sign of abating as the Autumn equinox draws near. Furthermore, Sesi of the Suaq (one of the current hosts of Sulkavaris, the spirit of the nation) is reported to have received a mysterious delivery in the night from a barefooted young woman wrapped in a dark sealskin. He is being tight-lipped about the nature of the gift - but has said enough to confirm that it relates to the seal-folk, and that he wishes to speak to those who share his tradition at the coming summit about it.

Significance

The blessing of the hylje seems set to continue through Winter. Assuming nothing else changes, any Wintermark character who owns a fleet or a farm in Sermersuaq receives a small bonus to their production in the coming downtime. The bonus represents the aid of the magical seal people, the hylje, who are supporting farmers, hunters, and fisherfolk, as well as ships travelling through the cold northern waters.

GRATEFUL DICK

Richard of Holberg will design three magical structures for the Conclave in thanks for his rescue

Richard of Holberg is a staunch ally of Sadogua - rumour suggests the two are somewhat more than friends. When the spire of Evenstar in Redoubt fell to the Grendel in Winter 381YE, Richard was being treated by the magician-healers and apothecaries there. Taken as a slave by the Grendel, he was rescued during the Summer Solstice by a band of heroic adventurers with the aid of the concerned Sadogua.

Having recovered from his ordeal, and after some discussion with the Wyrn-King, Richard has made an offer to the Imperial Conclave - to design a trio of magical structures for them. Trained at the University of Holberg, Richard is a competent magician but also a skilled architect, combining a talent for working with the flows of mana with hard-earned skill as a draughtsman and geometrist. Over the last twenty years or so he has designed or helped to design several structures intended to focus magical flows to produce mana. His health is not good, however, and working on new projects tires him.

The offer he makes is reasonably straightforward; during the Autumn Equinox, the Imperial Conclave may name up to three territories. Over the next few months, with the aid of servants of the Black Beast, and under advisement from the Eternal himself, he will create plans for structures to harness the flows of magic in those three territories - one structure per territory - and deliver them at the Winter Solstice. Each will represent a sinecure that may then be built by anyone empowered to do so (by a Senator or Imperial Wayleave, by the announcement of the Crystal Architect of the Spires (if one is in an Urizen territory), or - perhaps ideally - by the Arcane Architect). In the past, Richard has demonstrated a facility with design that saw him create a living weirwood tower that drew mana from an enchanted pool, a cunningly detailed rune-bound spire of mithril that provided significantly more mana than expected, and

a mithril dome over a white granite structure in Segura that provided a small amount of prismatic ink each season rather than crystal mana.

The only restriction he wishes to place is that these structures be appointed by the Imperial Conclave through the Declaration of Candidacy.

UNABLE TO SEE Yael FALLOUT

At the Summer Solstice, the General Assembly of the Imperial Synod condemned Yael, who claimed to be the First Empress reborn, for heresy. Her proposed Doctrine of The Beyond had been rejected and, by continuing to preach this as truth, she was found to be guilty as charged. She refused to recant and warned that she would continue to preach. She refused clemency at her trial and the magistrates ordered her execution. For most people in those nations that rejected Yael, her death marks the end of the matter.

But one nation did not reject her. The Highborn stood by their own, just as the nation once stood by the First Empress when she set forth with on a journey to unite all humanity. Now everyone is faced with the fact that their founding nation of The Way has taken a doctrinal position at odds with the rest of the Empire.

YOU MAKE YOUR TOMORROW

ONLY THE Highborn ASSEMBLY CAN PROVIDE THE
NECESSARY MORAL GUIDANCE TO THE Highborn NATION
TO HEAL THIS SCHISM

THE PENALTIES AFFECTING Highborn ARMIES THAT
FIGHT ALONGSIDE OTHER FORCES HAS INCREASED TO 60%
FOR MILITARY UNITS AND 25% FOR ARMIES

The Nations of the Empire have passed judgement on Yael of Highguard. In the judgement of the League, Astrid Fjellrevening di Tassato called her "the false, deceitful Yael." The Navarr Assembly utterly rejected "Yael's claim to be the first Empress reborn". The Council of Nine rejected "Yael and her teachings".

Finally the General Assembly "rejects that Yael is the First Empress Reborn and disbelieves her vision and teachings as stated." Despite the overwhelming view of the Empire that there was no truth of any kind to her claims to be the First Empress Reborn or the Land Without Tears she refused to recant. In the end the General Assembly took the only remaining step and condemned Yael allowing the Imperial magistrates to execute her for heresy.

But none of this has influenced the people of Highguard who primarily look to their own National Assembly for guidance on spiritual matters. As long as that Assembly continues to back Yael there is no obvious way to preventing Yael's claims spreading through Highguard. The laws on religious crimes are explicit - they can only be invoked following a successful condemnation by the Imperial Synod. If the Highborn Assembly could be convinced to disavow Yael - then they could choose to pass a mandate designed to discourage any further interest in her. Such a mandate would require a lot of liao - given how deep passions run on this subject, given how much preaching has already taken place, it would not be easy to change course... but it would be possible.

We send (named) priest) with 250 liao to disavow Yael. Her claim to be the First Empress Reborn has proven false and her visions of the Land Without Tears are without basis or merit. We urge all Highborn citizens to reject her.

Highborn Assembly mandate

Melchior of Adina's Charge has suggested an alternate wording for this mandate, which the civil service predict will have the same effect but is more conciliatory in tone.

We cannot prove for certain if Yael was the first Empress reborn or not. Regardless of this and no matter who Yael was, the Land without Tears is not part of doctrine and preaching it as such is Heresy. We refute the claim of the Land without Tears and encourage our citizens to look to only those Doctrines which have been debated and agreed upon by the Synod rather than allowing one figure to tear our faith and our Empire apart. We the priests of Highguard send (named priest) with 250 Liao to spread this message to the citizens of Highguard.

Highborn Assembly mandate

Of course that assumes that the Highborn Assembly are minded to pass such a mandate - the current evidence suggests otherwise. At present it seems there are a significant number of priests, in the Highborn Assembly and in other assemblies who continue to support Yael and her teaching despite the rejection of her doctrine by the Synod. If Yael's supporters prove pivotal in preventing the Highborn Assembly from acting, then the only effective option for the Synod may be to gather evidence and consider charges of condemnation.

The most obvious alternative is simply to do nothing... but that would mean accepting the continued spread across Highguard of Yael's claims to be the First Empress Reborn. The longer that goes on, the more complete the conversion - the more painful any solution will ultimately be. And while they delay the split between the Empire and Highguard continues to widen. The difficulties facing Imperial armies fighting together continue to grow worse and the problems could well spread to other areas if this is not dealt with.

THE ABSENCE OF HATE

A CHANGE OF DOCTRINE BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
WOULD ENSURE THAT Highborn Priests are safe
FROM CONDEMNATION

A MANDATE COULD BE AUTHORIZED THAT WOULD BOOST
MORALE IN THE Highborn Armies Granting a 20%
BONUS TO VICTORY POINTS GAINED IN BATTLES

THE MANDATE WOULD ALSO INCREASE THE SURGE IN
PROSPERITY IN Highguard, RAISING IT TO TWO
ADDITIONAL RANKS FOR ALL AFFECTED RESOURCES

When news of Yael's execution spreads across Highguard many are concerned that those who followed her will react with anger or violence - but the first response is one of sadness. Yael had long predicted that the Synod would ultimately lack the Courage to embrace her revelations and that at the end they would turn on her. Everything has transpired as she predicted - and few people here seem to blame the other nations or the Synod for their lack of vision.

The overwhelming response is one of sorrow and pity. Of all the people of the Empire - the Highborn were the first to discover the Way - why should anyone be surprised that in this time of revelation the Highborn are the only ones to truly see? But few believe that Yael would have wanted them to take up arms in her name - to ride forth on a new crusade - to put the unbelievers to the sword. The other nations may be misguided - but they are still part of the Empire. There are conditions worse than being unable to see.

In the absence of hate there is only an intense pain felt in the hearts of many. Yael's revelation of the Land Without Tears brought the hope of a better life, an escape beyond the Labyrinth to a world without sorrows or loss. Her followers are certain that Yael, having delivered her revelation, will have returned to the Land Without Tears now that her life has passed. But her followers were touched personally by her deep conviction, her quiet courage, her steel determination to walk her path to the end. And so they weep to know that a life of such pure virtue has ended so soon.

But as the pain inflicted by Yael's death begins to fade the sorrow gives way to a growing concern. The doctrinal rift between Highguard and the Empire is affecting the ability of the Imperial armies to fight together continues to grow worse. How will the Empire deal with this growing schism? If Yael herself can be put to death who else is safe? The threat to those who teach others of the Land Without Tears will ensure for as long as the Empire refuses to accept Yael's revelation. Highborn priests who have been the bedrock of doctrinal purity for nearly five hundred years are now vulnerable to charges of heresy, leading to possible condemnation and execution. Only the General Assembly can resolve this problem - a

successful change of doctrine to accept the Land Without Tears would mean that the Highborn people could practice their faith without fear of persecution.

So the Highborn people are looking to their Assembly for leadership in this crucial hour. The leaders of the nation have spoken - overwhelmingly endorsing Yael and backing her vision of what lies beyond the Labyrinth of Ages. That decision has healed the rift within Highguard - brothers and sisters in chapter houses across the nation are once more united in their shared understanding of their faith. Even now, in chapter-houses all across the nation, there are priests conveying the news of the First Empress Reborn, teachers helping children to learn of the Land Without Tears, craftsmen fashioning new works extolling her Wisdom and Courage.

The sorrow at her death has not diminished the great joy that most Highborn feel at the recognition that the greatest human being who ever lived was reborn to them. The people are enormously proud of Yael and of her place within their pantheon of inspiring figures. That pride has translated into a great boom in prosperity which looks set to continue for the foreseeable future. The statement of principle that was passed has settled the doctrinal differences of opinion within Highguard - the majority of the general populace now accept the existence of the Land Without Tears as revealed by the First Empress Reborn. But there is still a difference between accepting the truth and embracing it.

We send (named priest) with 75 liao to spread the truth of the First Empress Reborn and the revelations of the Land Without Tears throughout Highguard. Let everyone embrace the truth revealed by Yael.

Highborn Assembly Mandate

If the mandate above is implemented then this act of confirmation and the proselytizing it empowered would be sufficient to cause the Highborn people to fully embrace Yael's vision. There would be no easy return from such an act, but the resulting surge in piety and purpose would bring confidence and surety of purpose to every Highborn citizen. That would mean that all Highborn armies would be more effective in battle (they would generate 20% more victory points) in any campaign where they were not fighting alongside a nation that had rejected the doctrine of the Land Without Tears. In addition the current surge in Prosperity across Highguard would double for as long as that effect lasts.

WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

SINKHOLES, MINES & DREDGERY

NORTHERN SINKHOLE

Last season, an immense sinkhole opened up in the north-western Empire, radically changing the geography and ruining the livelihoods of a great many people. The area affected by the sinkhole was prosperous and rich in resources - many of which were destroyed by the subsidence. The lands around Dunhearth Hall in Hahnmark were known to have been particularly badly hit. With the support of the Imperial Senate, however, the construction of a new hall - New Dunhall - was speedily undertaken on the northernmost edge of the great pit.

The Imperial Senate also passed two other motions to do with the sinkhole; to auction the rights to name the Sinkhole, and to create the title of Delver in the Depths, to make ownership of the sinkhole - and its valuable bounty of weltsilver - a matter for the Imperial Bourse.

Developments

The civil service estimates that whoever purchases the title of Delver of the Depths will receive 50 ingots of weltsilver, 20 tempest jade, and 12 crystal mana each season. With careful monitoring, they are confident that there will be not risk of rousing the trogoni that lurk in the depths of the crater, and that it will take at least a decade before there is any chance of the rich bounty beginning to slacken.

An opportunity has come to light, in the form of the popular scholar and historian Peter of Hintown. The sometime civil servant has a great deal of interest in ancient history. Along with a party of Winterfolk, he was responsible both for uncovering some of the secrets of the Gildenheim runeforge, and for discovering the rich vein of mithril that would ultimately lead to the foundation of the Pride of Ikka's Tears. Stormcrow Tormund Crowstooth has contacted Peter and his companions, and suggested that he might be just the person to undertake an exploration of some of the deeper tunnels exposed by the sinkhole. Peter has agreed, and is excited by the chance to explore the sinkhole, but cautions that such an expedition would not be cheap - and it would be the sole responsibility of whoever ends up as Delver of the Depths to issue him an invitation. Otherwise he will stay away.

Peter has agreed to compile a short report about any findings he makes in the depths, and make the results public. All that is required is to for the Delver in the Depths, once they have won the title, to send him a winged messenger at New Dunhall, Wood Heath, in Hahnmark authorising him to undertake his expedition. He would require 5 Thrones for supplies, weapons, and armour (the Delver of the Depths would need to ensure this money was in their inventory and e-mail plot@profounddecisions.co.uk after the event).

Alternatively, as Peter is still associated (at least peripherally) with the Department for Historical Research, he is prepared to accept an announcement by the Dredgemaster of Feverwater, Advisor on the Vallorn, or Minister for Historical Research, or by a Senator, instructing him by name to explore the tunnels. Again this would require 5 thrones, and again he would insist on making his discovery public - but crucially this would not count against the limit of two historical research commissions imposed on the Empire by the diminished size of the department. Peter of Hintown is essentially on an extended sabbatical from the civil service as he and his brave Winterfolk companions explore the depths of the Empire for mysteries of the past.

TROUBLE IN SERRA BRIANTE

The Great Mine of Briante is due to be auctioned by the Imperial Bourse this season.

Three days ago, a winged messenger was received at Anvil from one of the overseers of the Great Mine. The magistrates quickly became involved. It seems that with the eyes of the Empire turning toward Anvil, a daring gang of orcs launched a clever heist against several of the wagons transporting mithril from the mine to a civil service maintained warehouse. There was some fighting. Four wains of mithril are unaccounted for, presumably stolen by the orcs along with the wagons and the oxen. The orcs themselves are believed to have fled back into the mountains, perhaps even reaching Jotun held territory in Liathaven already.

The immediate repercussion is that the Great Mine will provide slightly less mithril than normal - while it will continue to provide 22 wains of mithril going forward, this season it will provide only 18 wains. Given the seat is up for auction at the Autumn Equinox, the civil service are quick to disseminate this information so that anyone interested in claiming the seat can make an informed choice.

The Freeborn egregore has also let it be known that the militia in Serra Briante have captured one of the orcs ... and a herald apparently in the service of a Summer eternal although they refuse to reveal any information about which one which makes things even more awkward. The egregore is also aware of a conjunction on the Sentinel Gate that will permit up to five people to travel to the Great Mine in Serra Briante at seven o' clock on Friday evening. It is assumed that, in the absence of a current holder for the Bourse seat, the militia will be responsible for investigating the theft, seeing if any mithril can be recovered, and if possible ensuring another similar theft does not occur. Individuals with particular expertise or interest in this case may wish to make themselves known to the militia as soon as possible after reaching Anvil.

One question that seems quite important is how precisely the orcs got to the Great Mine of Briante in the first place, as well as how they got the wagons of mithril away, given regular patrols from the garrison at Fort Braydon. Perhaps this mysterious "summer herald" knows more.

SHADOWS OVER FEVERWATER

A few days ago, another message reached the civil service at Anvil with a desperate message for the Dredgemaster of Feverwater. According to the note, something has attacked the boats that trawl the Feverwater for valuables and Terunael artifacts. Several people are dead, others missing, and there are signs the creature has moved inland to threaten Black Sails steading. The creature appears to be an

immense marshwalker, and there are concerns that its attack is not a coincidence. The Druj, after all, are known to make use of these creatures from time to time, and half of the Feverwater lies in the Mallum. There have been concerns from the dredgers in the past that the further east they pushed, the greater the danger the Druj might decide to launch an attack against them.

When a sinecure is threatened, it is generally the responsibility of the title holder to ensure it is defended. At the moment its not clear who the Dredgemaster is. The Navarr egregore reports that there is a conjunction on the Sentinel Gate for seven o' clock Friday night. It will allow up to thirty citizens to visit a location near Dredgemaster's Wharf at Black Sails steading in East Ashes, where the offices of the Dredgemaster are located.

BIRDS AND BATS

SUMMER KNIGHT, SUMMON NIGHT.

CHATTERING BIRDS

LASHONAR PROPOSES A CONTEST OF WORDS.

A chattering bird, one of the heralds of the eternal Lashonar, delivered a sonnet to the civil servants associated with the Imperial Conclave. In poetic languages, it proposes a contest run by Rossignol the Herald, with the enthusiastic support of the Conscience-of-Kings. The contest, it appears, concerns the creation of love letters - a form of expression known to be of particular interest to the eternal.

Anyone who wishes may place their name and location in a "vessel of interest", which will be located in the Hall of Worlds. Rossignol intends to come to Anvil and visit any who leave their names, and discuss the rules and timescales of this competition in person with them. The herald is not expecting to receive - and will ignore - messages that contain anything other than a name and a location at Anvil where that person can be found.

The civil servants expect that the vessel will be present on the Friday night of the Autumn Equinox, and that anyone can put someone's name into the vessel - thus making the competition open to all regardless of whether they are a mage. It is not clear what the consequences might be for putting someone's name forward with malicious intent, but the wise caution against testing the patience of an eternal, even one as relaxed as Lashonar.

DESPERATE SLOTH

SADOGUA'S BORED OF BEING PUNISHED FOR KILLING IMPERIAL CITIZENS

The Brother of Wizards, the Father of Bats, the Globberslotch, o Patrício Preto, has made no secret of the fact that he is increasingly distressed by the Empire's decision to remove him from the list of eternalists who enjoy the amity of the Empire. A week before the Autumn Equinox, he dispatches a messenger to speak to the civil service. Giving her name as Neora of Spiral, the messenger appears to be a mortal girl of no more than twelve years old, albeit one with a potent naga lineage.

She formally requests the right of parley with the Empire on behalf of the Black Sloth, under the auspices of the Archmage. Her mentor wishes to discuss a number of topics but specifically wishes to talk about an opportunity to save the Halls of Knowledge from the Druj.

If there is any time after that, he also politely requests an opportunity to offer a minor boon to the Imperial magicians - specifically over the years he has provided a number of rare items to Imperial magicians to help them with their magic. Should the Empire consent to offer him a parley, he would like to offer the opportunity to have such items reforged or restored in power as appropriate (although Neora indicates that there may be a little quid pro quo involved).

He would also like to discuss "the location of a certain weirwood tree" with anyone who might have information about it, and what kind of boon they might ask in return for disclosing this information.

Finally, in the event that a formal parley is granted him, she mentions that this would be a perfect opportunity for the tea houses interested in the legacy of the Dark Moon to discuss that matter with him.

It is rare, but not unknown, for an eternalist to request a parley without responding to a plenipotentiary message. The final decision rests with the Archmage of night. Should they wish to offer the parley, they should let the civil service know, and dispatch a Missive for Sadogua to let the Brother of Wizards know. The time suggested for the parley is half past ten on Saturday night - assuming that the Imperial Conclave has concluded its business by then - or immediately afterwards if not.

HUNTERS AND WOLVES

WINTER, SORIN AFFAIRS

Three incidents involving Winter eternal have been brought to the attention of the Imperial citizenry in the last few months. The Tomb-King Sorin has dispatched a herald to recruit participants for a trial of suffering. The Bound-King Tharim of the Thrice-cursed Court has taken advantage of the recent Declaration of Amity to send heralds to the Empire. In Hahnmark, an agent of Wendigo is captured while trying to sow discord and distrust between Wintermark and Varushka.

THE TRIALS OF THE PALLID WOLF

THE GRIM ETERNAL SORIN SEEKS PARTICIPANTS IN A TRIAL
OF HARD CHOICES AND SUFFERING.

When the soberly dressed draughir arrives at the Castle of Thorns shortly before the Autumn Equinox she is at first assumed to be bringing messages from Highguard Senators. It is quickly established, however, that she is actually acting as a messenger on behalf of a herald of Sorin named Exquy - presumably on behalf of the Hungry Wolf himself. She politely asks that the message she delivers be circulated to as many Imperial Citizens as possible; and the civil service have tried to make this letter available to anyone who may be interested.

It is clear that Sorin is not offering a general means of communication with this offer. Any information other than the specific details requested are likely to be ignored by the human agent and heralds alike.

IN THE COPSE OF THE BONE BIRCH

Three weeks after the Summer Solstice, three peculiar creatures emerge from a stand of birch trees in Birchland, near the village of Bickwoll. Known as the Copse of the Bone Birch, the area is part of a Winter regio. Wrapped in black cloaks, each one is accompanied by the clank of chains and shows the marks of mortification on their bodies. They are by all accounts heralds of the eternal Tharim.

Their appearance interrupts the ceremonial watering of the birch trees - a ritual designed to protect the local trees from disease and parasites - and causes some consternation. In cold, arrogant tones they explain to the gathered coven that their presence is in accord with the wishes of the Imperial Conclave. They then split up. One heads north, the other east, and while Beaters manage to follow them for a while they soon lose them in the dark woods.

The third creature, calling itself Obligatus picks an old stump near the middle of the regio, sits down ... and doesn't move for two months. Landskeeper Benjamin Bickwoll is keeping a close eye on the situation and has grumpily allowed that he might be prepared to receive and maybe even answer any winged messengers any other Landskeepers might want to send to him. (Address: Benjamin Bickwoll, the Copse of the Bone Birch, near Bickwoll, Birchland, Upwold)

THE HAHNMARK STRANGLER

In recent months there have been various lurid reports of mutilated corpses in Skarsind and neighbouring parts of Wintermark. These reports have been investigated thoroughly by the Imperial magistrates who discovered that several of the reported acts were the work of a deranged fanatic, a devotee of the Wendigo who lost all reason in a terrible storm a few winters back. The individual had murdered at least one person and appeared to be deliberately defiling bodies.

The individual has been caught, tried and executed and there is no reason to expect any further influence from Wendigo on this matter. It appears that his intentions were to try and deepen the divisions between Wintermark and Varushka arising from the incident with Dogri Thulebane and the Iron Helms. Fortunately these attempts appear to have conclusively failed.

OUT OF VOID, OUT OF CHAOS

MAGIC CHANGES

The Wanderer rarely pauses so profoundly in its perambulations through the heavens, but for the last three months it has hung balefully in the constellation of the Great Wyrms. The emblem of transformation and transfiguration - the concept that change is not just possible but that it is utterly inevitable - the Great Wyrms is sometimes used as a symbol of magic itself. Most pertinently, perhaps, it is an emblem of alchemical workings - the process whereby magic (most especially night magic) combines substances to create something greater. The Great Wyrms transforms everything, for good or ill.

A simple conjunction of the Great Wyrms and the Wanderer, with the Wyrms ascendant, is seen as a sign of some transcendent change. And yet at first nothing seems to actually be changing. Slowly, however, information begins to filter into the community of Imperial magicians from covens who make a study of powerful rituals that something peculiar is afoot.

MY DREAMS ALL MY OWN

Dreamers experience profound dreams of personal transformation and impossible things.

Odd dreams are a common result of a powerful conjunction. Over the three months, many people experience dreams of profound personal transformation and impossible things. For some, the dreams revolve around the idea of being someone or something other than they are - dreams in which they have a different sex, or no sex at all, or where they possess lineage other than their own. Some orcs dream of being human, and some humans of being orcs. A common thread to many dreams is one where the dreamer experiences a moment in their life where they made a choice - sometimes significant, just as often mundane - but in the dream they make a different choice and events unfold differently.

Others have inspirational dreams of impossible things. Mundane things are made marvellous, and with the strange logic of dreams the dreamer explores the strange. One may explore a castle made of rainbow soap bubbles, or fly through the air wearing a suit made of dragonfly wings. Another may dream of a great siege engine that throws living stars that sing heartbreaking arias as they plunge towards the walls of a fortress of black fire, or of a tree composed of meat whose throbbing fruit bleed when bitten. As often as not, dreamers awaken deeply unsettled and with a nagging suspicion that the impossible things they have dreamt might be in some way real - or that they could make them real somehow.

There is no specific roleplaying effects, but this is an excellent event for a player to choose to have their character experience a dream that encourages them to make a significant change, or inspires them to try and achieve a goal at odds with their usual personality.

THE EGG OF SHADOWS

The ritual Distill the Serpent's Stone is producing something subtly different.

The ritual Distill the Serpent's Stone creates a unique and powerful substance through the art of alchemy - using ilium and crystal mana to transform a handful of base materials into something that can empower magic, remove curses, and transubstantiate poisons. During the coming Autumn Equinox, the product of this potent alchemical transformation will be something a little different.

Instead of producing a serpent's stone, the ritual will create a shadow egg. Matt black in colouration, the oval stone is easily broken open in bare hands. Anyone who does so immediately gains a temporary boost to their Realm lore skill of 6 effective ranks for purposes of performing a single ritual, provided they already possess at least one innate skill rank of that Lore. These additional ranks do not grant any additional mastered rituals, and a character's total effective rank can never be more than three times their innate skill (the number of ranks of the appropriate Realm Lore they have gained by spending experience points). This is more than sufficient to triple the effective power of a master of realm lore - indeed a less studied individual will struggle to use the full power of the stone.

At the same time, these shadow eggs appear to have no effect on poisons or curses, and do not allow materials to be transformed.

Serpent's stones that have already been distilled keep all their old powers and can be used freely during the Equinox - they do not seem to have undergone any change at all.

An earlier version of this wind had a section allowing a change of sex under the effect of this ritual. We've removed that following feedback that identified why it was inappropriate. We obviously didn't mean to cause offense; I apologize to everyone for doing so. - Matt P.

AN ECHO OF SOULS

Transmogrification of the Soul's Echo is permitting more profound transformations.

As with the power to distill a serpent's stone, the power to profoundly change someone's identity represents grand mastery of the realm of night. As some alchemists combine disparate materials to

create unique substances, so this ritual allows others to recombine elements of a person's identity to create a new person.

During the coming Autumn Equinox, the power of this ritual is enhanced. In addition to the normal changes, anyone who is targeted with it may choose from certain additional transformations.

If they are a naga, they may choose to completely lose their lineage. Over the next few hours all trappings will peel away, leaving them as a standard human at the end of it. At the same time the influence of their naga blood over their character will disappear potentially leading to a change of personality.

If they are a human who has no other lineage, they may choose to slowly transform into a naga. This may take between a few hours and several days. At the end of this time, they have the naga lineage at whatever strength they desire.

They may choose as part of the transformation to change any or all of their current skills.

They may choose to forget only their mastered rituals, their artisan recipes, or their potion recipes. In each of these cases, they can only forget everything or nothing from a category - it is not possible to lose some rituals and keep others for example.

It is important to remember that it is the target who chooses which transformations to apply, and while the coven performing the ritual may try to influence them they play no part in the ultimate outcome of the transmutation.

MURIT AND SOGHTER

Heralds of Murit and Soghter have disappeared.

Over the last six months, magicians from the enchanters in Dawn to Stargazers of Urizen have reported that heralds of the night eternal Soghter and Murit appear to be disappearing. Herald with ongoing arrangements with Imperial citizens have terminated those arrangements, encouraged those friendly to Murit or Soghter to call in any boons owed, and generally concluded their business before vanishing. They are believed to be returning to the night realm as soon as their obligations are discharged.

Since the incident in the Mournwold, heralds of the two eternal have been conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, the only two who seem to have been in evidence anywhere are the ones known as Centimani, herald of Soghter, and Alkahest herald of Murit, and they seem to be appearing only on the field at Anvil.

Further, across the Empire regio associated with the two eternal have become "sealed". The doors at their hearts seem to be locked in some fashion, apparently from the other side. While they can be forced with ritual magic, the few magicians who have risked doing so either have not returned - or have returned utterly changed in some fashion with no memory of how the transformation took place.

A few concerned communiques from the Principalities of Jarm and Faraden imply that the same thing is happening there.

Needless to say this has led to a great deal of speculation that something significant is happening to the two eternals - and that it seems focused on or around the Empire. So far, other night eternals refuse to offer an explanation as to what is happening, and generally change the subject if it is brought up.

QUEENS AND KINGS

SUMMER SOME

Over the last few months, there have been communications from the eternals of the Summer realm to the magicians of the Empire. Some have come directly, via heralds, while others have been delivered through more formal channels to the civil servants who support the Imperial Conclave.

The most significant is probably the matter of the Tourney of Sun and Ice which will determine - at least for a little while - the patronage of the Icy Crag of the Eternal Sun. There is another associated matter - that of Eleonaris, and who will represent her in the tourney.

A third, unrelated matter involves the mysterious eternal lord of the underworld, King Adamant, who has sent his koboldi servants to make an interesting offer to the mine owners of the Empire. Provided the Imperial Conclave agrees, of course.

A TOURNEY OF SUN AND ICE

CHAMPIONS CHOSEN BY THE ETERNALS OF THE SUMMER
REALM WILL COMPETE TO DETERMINE THE PATRONAGE
OF THE ICY CRAG OF THE ETERNAL SUN.

The Icy Crag of the Eternal Sun has been marred with controversy ever since members of the Order of the Rod and Shield, under the guidance of Meraud, bested Cathan Canae's champion and seized the patronage of the college. This was met with retribution from the Queen of Ice and Darkness who buffeted the college with a frozen blizzard for several seasons. The Archmage of Summer was eventually able to negotiate the cessation of the storms, but only by suggesting a tourney between the interested Summer eternals to settle the matter of patronage - at least for the time being.

The Civil Service have advised that the first Great Tourney of Sun and Ice will take place during the Autumn Equinox. Barien, the Master of Challenges, has (as requested by Solomon, the Archmage of Summer) organised those Summer eternals with an interest in the college of magic, and they have declared champions to represent them in the tourney.

The rules of the tourney are not secret, although it is not public knowledge who the various eternals have chosen as their champions. Each champion will be given a carefully created token to show that they have been chosen - and will present them to the master of ceremonies at the start of the tourney.

To the victor

The eternal whose champions win the tourney will become patron of the Icy Crag of the Eternal Sun. This will not change the duties or powers of the Master of Ice and Darkness, but it is not impossible that the new patron will seek to cement their position with some sort of boon. They are also likely to try to push the researchers of the college in the direction of magic that serves their personal agendas.

The patronage will be settled until one of the Summer eternal chooses to launch a challenge - a year in the mortal realm at least and maybe significantly longer depending on how secure the patron appears in their relationship with the Master and the Imperial Conclave.

The Tourney of Sun and Ice

The Tourney will be fought within the Dawnish Glory square, at 4:30pm on the Saturday of the Autumn Equinox at Anvil. It will determine the eternal patron of the Icy Crag of the Eternal Sun until such time as another eternal chooses to formally challenge for the right of patronage.

1) The eternal, Eleonaris, Queen of the Fields of Glory; Jaheris, The Shadowed Prince; Cathan Canae, Queen of Ice and Darkness; Meraud, the Golden Magician; Rhianos, Regent of the Eternal sea, and Adamant, King of the Golden Deeps have shown an interest in this Tourney.

2) The tourney will take the form of a grand martial melee.

3) Each eternal of the Summer realm taking part may sponsor a band of three champions to bear their favour in the melee, drawn from citizens of the Empire. What agreements they make with those citizens are a private concern.

4) Each champion shall have a token that show their entry into the tourney. Without the token, the champions shall not be allowed to partake.

5) Champions may be girded as their patrons see fit, but any direct interference during the melee by any inhabitant of the realms will disqualify all three of their champions.

6) The last champion standing at the end of the melee will be crowned victor, and their sponsor becomes patron of the college.

7) There is no dishonour in champions of one eternal bending their knee to another should two or three of them be the last ones standing.

THE LION OF SUMMER

Eleonaris appears divided in her attitude to the Empire

It is well known that The Lady of Pennants has not had a good relationship with the Empire since the death of Empress Britta. During Summer Solstice 378YE, Eleonaris was made subject to the Declaration of Enmity by the Imperial Conclave. Although in Winter 378YE her status was returned to neutrality. Conflicts between the Queen of the Fields of Glory and the Queen of Ice and Darkness escalated in recent years, with may in the Empire seeming to take the side of the Lady of the Frost.

In response Eleonaris has been open in her support for the Jotun orcs, and threatened that if any save the witches of Dawn called on her Knights of Glory, they would do so at the cost of aiding their enemies. Recent rumours suggest that Jaheris| has left the side of Eleonaris for the first time since the Eternals were encountered, and taken up a crown of his own - overthrowing Hayaak to claim the Forest of Arden. If this is true then the rage of the Lion of Summer is bound to be at a new peak.

It is a month before the Autumn Equinox when two heralds approach the civil service. The first is tall and elegant in a long dress but carrying a two handed sword, the second in chain and plate and a red tabard bearing a rampant lion with a large warhammer and sheild in his hands. Their summer heritage is clear to see. They pass a statement to the civil service to be passed around to the Empire, and place a small bag of golden apples as payment for the task. They are polite, but they are not talkative and it seems that the ire of the Commander of the Golden Armies has spread to those she commands.

The civil service publicise this message in wayhouses and taverns across the Empire, even sending word to those returning from the armies should they wish to compete in this challenge. How Eleonaris will gird them is unknown, but it is likely that it will be a potent Summer Enchantment. Many of the Dawnish are shocked by the response when the posters are nailed up in their lands, for officially there has been no words from the Troubadors or the Dawnish senators on the matter of Eleonaris, and it is thought that they will be looking to those going to Anvil for a statement on this matter.

THE TALENTED KOBOLDI

Over the last three months, there have been a multitude of encounters with koboldi across the Empire. In general, each encounter goes the same way - a single foreman with a list, two miners, and two soldiers armed and armoured in mithril scale and nasal helms. They are unfailingly polite, and they appear to be seeking out individuals who own mines in all nations. Their message is straightforward; their master King Adamant, wishes to offer the aid of his koboldi legions to the Empire in the coming season, as a sign of friendship. The koboldi are expert tunnelers, builders, and miners. In return for a gift of white granite, they will use their expertise in conjunction with their supernatural talent for sniffing out precious materials, to help Imperial mine owners expand their mines.

The koboldi want a payment of white granite from each mine owner, and they will also claim anything that they find in the mines that is not green iron, orichalcum, tempest jade, or weltsilver. (OOO Note: The additional rings provided by enchantments, are not affected). When questioned, they say that they expect this to include mundane metals, gemstones, interesting rock strata, dragonbones, and perhaps

the occasional buried item of interest - but they claim that they are not looking for anything specific just claiming interesting treasures.

King Adamant does not currently have amity, however, so the koboldi will require some magical assistance. King Adamant says that if the Grandmaster of the Golden Pyramid order - and only the Grandmaster - raises a Declaration of Concord in which they formally thank King Adamant and invite his koboldi to aid the Empire in the coming season, then the Empire will be able to use the ritual Delve Deep, Beneath the Mountain to indicate which mines his Koboldi engineers should visit. As a result, in addition to its normal effect, the owner of any mine enchanted with this effect at the Summer Solstice will be visited by koboldi workers.

It is likely that the same effect could be achieved by offering King Adamant amity, but the eternal has not formally requested that status.

The offer is only available for a single season. However, should at least a third of the Empire's mine owners take advantage of Adamant's kind offer, then the opportunity may be extended.

RABBITS AND SNARES

PLENIPOTENTIARY RESPONSES

IRA HARRAH, THE LICTORS, AND ZAKALWE HAVE PUBLICLY
RESPONDED TO PLENIPOTENTIARY MESSAGES.

IRA HARRAH

Irre Harrah, the Prince with a Thousand Foes, has sent a response to a plenipotentiary from Volfe of Ashenhall, Archmage of Spring. The eternal has had little time for the Empire recently, and there is rumour that the execution of his Varushkan allies has soured him on Imperial magicians.

A month before the Autumn Equinox a young briar, dressed in Marcher garb, comes to speak to the civil service. They bring a message that Irre Harrah will attend a parley with the Empire to "discuss the Mournwold, the state of the Barrens and the tyrants of Asavea." The youth further explains that the eternal wishes to discuss matters with those who have not passed their citizenship test to find out their views; to meet with Raewynn Farkas of the Navarr and with the Highborn Hazelelponi of the Shattered Tower; and that after his business with them is complete, he will be available briefly to speak to the Spring Archmage.

The Golden Hare has not given a specific time for the parley, but the child estimates that it is likely to be "some time around two on Saturday."

Any Imperial magician may attend a formal parley, but it is at the discretion of the Spring Archmage who may speak. However, as a parting comment, the messenger says that although they Ira Harrah abide by the rules of parley, the Guard of the Young does not have any wish to speak to the Imperial Warmage, and that if they are in attendance the Thorn of the Ancestors will withdraw immediately.

THE LICTORS

The Lictors are something of an unknown quantity to the Empire. Precisely seven days, seven hours, and seven minutes after the plenipotentiary was dispatched a single paper-thin square of green iron was delivered to the civil service by a heavily cloaked and masked figure with brazen claws. Engraved on the square was a straightforward message: "We accept the invitation of the Archmage. Formal parley will take place at the eleventh hour on the first night of the Autumn Equinox."

It is rare for the Brass Magistrates to a request for a meeting - a formal request of plenipotenary from an Archmage is one of the few reliable ways of getting their undivided attention. With that in mind, the civil service advise caution for anyone wishing to attend the parley. As with other formal parleys, anyone may attend but it is at the discretion of the Autumn archmage who may speak.

ZAKALWE

Three days after the Summer Solstice, a polite letter, written with beautiful brush strokes, is received by the civil service. It explains that Zakalwe has received the message of Gancius della Notte di Sarvos, the Archmage of Day. Zakalwe will be happy to send representatives to the Hall of Worlds at the fifth hour on the second day of the Summit. The General of Day himself will not be attending, and furthermore he does not consider that discussion of a general issue merits a formal parley.

As a consequence, the meeting should remain as an informal discussion rather than a full parley. Consequently, he has instructed his representatives that, should the Archmage of Day wish, the discussion may begin in the Hall of Worlds and then move to the Imperial Military Council on the field at Anvil, the better to allow those who will struggle to enter the Hall to participate.

The letter also includes a specific request that Vaan of the Auric Horizon, a citizen of Urizen, be invited to the discussion; Zakalwe wishes to fulfil an obligation due to that individual. There are no further details in the letter as to what this obligation may be, or how the Eternal intends to fulfil it.

Day	Time	Eternal	Realm	Formal Parlay
Friday	11pm	The Lictors	Autumn	Yes
Saturday	2pm	Ira Harrah	Spring	Yes
Saturday	5pm	Zakalwe	Day	No

SCHOLARS AND MANDARINS

WHAT A DAY

Two separate groups of heralds from the endless sky-ocean of the Day realm have been at large in the Empire. The Great Library Phaleron has sent one of its librarians to arrange a meeting with certain specific magicians. At the same time, a trio of heralds representing Sinokenon, Ylenrith, and Roshanwe are traveling together to speak to covens and individual practitioners who are masters of Day magic, offering boons from their masters.

THE CELESTIAL LIBRARY

The Great Library Phaleron has requested an opportunity to speak with magicians who have mastered the Celestial Library

Phaleron, the great library, has sent one of its librarians to speak to the civil service to arrange a meeting. The tall, otherworldly herald is painfully precise and cordial, and explains that one of the outer chambers of the Coral Library will be open to all those of the Empire who have mastered the ritual known as The Celestial Library. This chamber will be open from the eleventh hour of the Saturday morning of the equinox, for those who do not plan on taking the Sentinel Gate to fight for the Empire.

Phaleron would especially like to speak to Garth and Genieve of the Anvil Library; to the Archmage of Day, Gancius della Notte di Sarvos; and to Skywise Gralka and Sian Eternal. If any of those named guests, or their proxies, cannot cast the Celestial Library ritual then entry to the chamber will be made available.

It seems that the "outer chamber" represents one of those places that lies part-way between a Realm and the mortal world, and can be reached via the Hall of Worlds. Access has been magically barred to those who have not mastered the ritual of the Celestial Library, unless they are one of the named individuals.

THE HERALDS OF DAY

Over the last month, a trio of heralds from the realm of Day have visited with prominent practitioners of Day magic across the Empire. Each serves a different eternal. The leader of the group is a samite-clad androgynous figure with golden skin, a functionary at the court of Sinokenon. It is accompanied by a being very like a merrow, but with a bronzed colouration and clad in the manner of the Brass Coast, who speaks for Roshanwe. The third is a slightly built creature similar to an orc, with feathers across his head, dressed in the manner of a Thule warlock but carrying a lyte who represents Ylenrith. Each one brings an offer to the Conclave.

A GIFT OF BINDING

Sinokenon offers a gift to the Orders to help restrict abuse of magic

The offer is straightforward enough. To help the Conclave enforce their Declaration of Sorcery, Sinokenon will provide one of the Conclave orders with a talisman that will significantly boost the ability to perform the ritual All the World in a Grain of Sand. Sinokenon suggests that any sorcerer could then be subjected to the curse, significantly reducing their ability to perform rituals – should they be inclined to break the law.

Sinokenon does not have amity – and is not seeking it. Instead, it asks only that the Imperial Conclave perform a Declaration of Endowment to deliver the talisman to the Grandmaster of a nominated order – either the Celestial Arch, Sevenfold Path, or Shattered Lantern – and then its use would be an issue for that Order to oversee.

If the Imperial Conclave accepts, and uses the curse to mark sorcerers, Sinokenon is prepared to have the item reforged each year and would be open to a discussion about providing the Conclave with a means to make their own talismans.

If the Conclave refuses, Sinokenon's heralds make it clear that their master will not be offended – but that it will not make the offer again.

A GIFT OF INQUISITION

Roshanwe offers the gift of a new divination

The eternal Roshanwe appears a little disappointed that nobody has taken her offer to provide boons to those who acted against the supporters of the Whisper Gallery. She continues to be concerned about magicians flouting the edicts of the Conclave, however, but her primary concern now is with rituals that have been interdicted.

She offers an arcane projection, which could be codified to provide Imperial investigators with a powerful divinatory tool. Using day magic, it would divine if a specific target or targets had performed a named ritual during the last three days. Effectively, it could be used to track down sorcerers who have broken their restriction against performing ritual magic, as well as covens who have chosen to perform illegal rituals. It is her expectation that the arcane projection would be codified at a college of magic, and made available to any Imperial magician who wishes to perform it.

As with Sinokenon, she does not require amity, all she asks is that a Declaration of Endowment be made to bestow the arcane projection she has had prepared to the master of a college of magic.

A GIFT OF PURITY

Ylenrith offers to help lineaged individuals purify the taint of magic from their bodies

The third herald is an agent of Ylenrith, and offers a very different gift to the Empire. In the realm of Day there is a certain pool that contains water of such purity that it can be used to wash away lineage from a human being. The herald says that there are many in the Empire who do not embrace the magic that

marks them out as different, and that Ylenrith will offer a gift of purifying water to the Empire to minister to those who would restore themselves to an untainted state.

The eternal knows that being responsible for aiding others in this fashion is a serious undertaking. She wishes to make this gift to the new Silver Chalice order so that they can heal people of the discord in themselves, and says she will make it up to the grandmaster to distribute as they wish. All the conclave has to do is pass a Declaration of Concord accepting the gift.

Several magicians in Highguard, and a number from other nations associated with the Sevenfold Path have already expressed caution about accepting this gift. Without knowing how the water actually works, it is possible that such a fundamental “cleansing” might be dangerous to the spirit. Worse, it might interfere with a soul's passage through the Labyrinth – or even cleanse the outward signs of lineage taint while leaving the spiritual influence of the blood behind, hidden. Highborn magisters in particular are suspicious of Ylenrith's motives in offering this “gift” - they mutter ominously that “purity” has several meanings, at least one of them deeply unpalatable.

A SILVER CHALICE

THE SILVER CHALICE

At the Summer Solstice the Imperial Senate passed a motion to establish The Silver Chalice, a new order in the Imperial Conclave. Such a thing has not happened in many years, so the civil service have prepared a general briefing to help people understand how the laws work in this regard and how the Empire has deal with such matters traditionally.

MOTTO, SYMBOL, AND MANIFESTO

The creation of a new Conclave order requires a successful constitutional motion to be passed by the Imperial Senate. Formally, the manifesto of the order should be included in the motion; in this specific case the manifesto was read out on the floor of the Senate - so all senators should be aware of the manifesto they have approved. Once the motion is approved, the only changes that are allowed to the order's manifesto are minor changes designed to improve the grammar. Anything that the Constitutional Court consider to represent a substantive change would require further authorization by the Imperial Senate.

At the point where the motion is passed, then the Conclave order comes into legal existence - but it is not possible for any character to join the order until the motto and symbol are finalized, since both are required for a successful ritual to create the first arcane mark. The citizens involved with passing the motion have provided the civil service with the order's symbol and informed them that the motto will be "The well of life is bottomless".

JOINING THE ORDER

THE CIVIL SERVICE HAVE PREPARED AN AUTUMN
MAGNITUDE 20 ARCANES PROJECTION TO CREATE THE
ARCANE MARK

NOBODY CAN JOIN THE ORDER UNTIL THIS RITUAL IS
COMPLETED

The magical ritual Arcane Mark allows a single magician to join an Imperial order when it is cast. Any number of magicians can join the order by performing this ritual, but it is not possible to use the ritual to create a new order - a different ritual is required to achieve that.

By tradition the Imperial civil service prepare an arcane projection to create the new arcane mark (and by extension the order) which is presented to those magicians assembled at the first meeting of the order. The motto and symbol of the order must be finalized by this point, as they are required by the ritual. Because of this requirement, those involved must obtain the help of an Autumn coven and the 10 additional mana crystals needed to perform the ritual. There is usually some competition to fill this prestigious role - after all it is not every day a coven gets to create a new order. It is common for any Autumn coven planning to join the order to volunteer but there is no formal or magical requirement for the magicians performing the ritual to be part of the new order. The order remains a formal part of the Conclave but no magician can join it until the ritual is complete.

The ritual allows everyone targeted to join the order at the same time that the order is created. In practice this usually saves valuable time and mana - provided that there are more than a few members looking to join.

The vote to elect the first grandmaster takes place immediately after the ritual is complete. Everyone who joins the order at the point where it is created is eligible to vote. In an exception to the normal rules, citizens who were eligible to elect a grandmaster of a different order in the previous twelve months are still eligible to vote in the first election.

The Overseer of Imperial Elections, Merlot, is due to present the arcane projection to the assembled magicians of the Conclave in the Hall of Worlds at 6pm on Saturday at the next summit.

No matter how many members join the order during the Autumn Equinox, it will automatically count as the smallest order in the Conclave for determining precedence. Precedence is based on the number of members an order has at the beginning of the summit.

THE FONT AND THE VAULTS

Once a Conclave order is established by the Imperial Senate it is eligible for a share of the font - however, initially, there are no members, so it does not receive any mana until the summit following the event at which the ritual to create the arcane mark is cast.

The order is eligible to receive a share of the ilium immediately, although it automatically counts as the smallest order in the Conclave for determining precedence, until the summit after the first members join.

A new order will not have any bequests, so it will usually have no unusual materials in the vaults. It is common for new orders to attract bequests in the first decade after they are created as people and powers take an interest in them.

The new grandmaster does not have the ability to acquire mana until a suitable source of mana is constructed. There are standard protocols used by the Imperial civil service for all orders, but the 30 wains of mithril (and 60 crowns) required must be provided by the new grandmaster at the end of their first summit elected. They will then be able to purchase mana normally following the next summit.