

# DEATH IS NOT THE END

HEAR THE WORDS OF YAEL. I CANNOT BE TURNED FROM THE TRUTH I PREACH. I SHALL CLEAVE TO WHAT I KNOW TO BE TRUE, AND I CAN DO NOTHING ELSE. IF THE SYNOD REJECTS MY WORDS AND REVELATION, LET IT CONDEMN ME, TRY ME, AND SEEK MY DEATH AS A HERETIC. THOUGH I AM GLAD TO FACE MY MARTYRDOM AS PERMION, I KNOW THAT THOSE WHO COME AFTER ME WILL BE AS LEPIDUS. THEY SHALL BE AS THE SEVEN STARS, TO GUIDE THE EMPIRE WHEN MY GUIDING LIGHT HAS BEEN SNUFFED OUT.

Yael, Assembly of Courage, Spring Equinox 381YE

## Overview

The schism in the Imperial Faith over the claims of Yael of Highguard (on her past life as the First Empress and the Land without Tears) is reaching a head. At the previous summit, seven of the ten Imperial nations overwhelmingly rejected Yael's claims. Seven individuals - Corey Wayfarer, Father Nikolovich Drakov, Astrid Fjellrevening di Tassato, Lucifaro i Erigo, Aarne Ceorling, Cathy Upwold and Zeno, Stallion's Sibling - were sent out from each of these nations to travel to Reikos and convince the people of their nation to give up their support for Yael and return home. Their mission was a success, and Yael's congregation is much diminished. Now many of those convinced of their errors by the seven have become strident voices against Yael in their home territories, angry at what they now believe to have been trickery.

However, the schism is far from over. The Dawnish assembly's position is uncertain - while the Dawnish Assembly chose not to spread Yael's song across the nation, and supported the ascension of the Imperatrix Lisabetta to the position of Queen of Dawn, they have not yet come out against Yael nor chosen to bring their own citizens back. Many in Dawn are confused by their assembly's position, and will no doubt look to them in the coming summit for firm guidance.

Meanwhile, the Highborn Assembly chose decisively to accept Yael. For the Highborn the news that the First Empress, the greatest mortal being in history has been reborn is transformative. The First Empress is revered in every nation in the Empire, but understandably she occupies a special place in Highborn history - where she is seen as the embodiment of what it means to be Highborn and to embrace that manifest destiny. Her return is a source of celebration and joy through Highguard, a joy that is only tempered by news of the ingratitude of those who dwell in the Empire she founded but whom have now rejected her.

With her status in dispute, the gulf between those who support Yael and those who reject her is deepening with potentially severe consequences for the Empire. For those who have denounced Yael as a liar, there are few opportunities to end her influence. The General Assembly has struggled to find the consensus needed to speak with a clear voice on the matter. Yael has made clear that she will never cease to preach her revelation, citing the Virtue of Courage which guides her to 'cleave to what she knows to be true'. The only way to stop her preaching for good would be for an appropriate Assembly to formally condemn her, laying charges of heresy against her and trusting in Imperial Law and the judgement of the magistrates. The sentence would be up to the presiding magistrate, but citizens have been executed for religious crimes much smaller in scale before.

Even this would not end the schism - it is not clear at this stage that the doctrinal rifts could be healed merely by the death of the one who has preached them. Indeed, many of Yael's followers that remain talk sometimes as if she is already a martyr -

anticipating her condemnation at the hands of a General Assembly that will not see the light. It is these voices in Highguard in particular who call for their assembly to pass a radical mandate indeed...

## Significance

- Wintermark, Varushka, Navarr, Urizen, the League, the Marches and the Brass Coast have sent priests with liao urging their people to reject Yael and denouncing her as false.
- The Imperial Orcs have made clear that they have no part in this conflict over Human destiny.
- Highguard and Dawn have embraced Yael, though Dawn appears to have internal doubt on the matter.

The seven nations that rejected Yael have sent priests to spread word that her claims are false and should be rejected. As a result of their actions, the flow of new pilgrims travelling from these nations to Highguard to try to meet with the First Empress has stemmed. She still has many followers but her congregation is only a fraction of its former size. It is not completely abated however, and some of the losses have been made up by new pilgrims coming from parts of Dawn and from all over Highguard.

The divisions between the two sides are deep and impossible to reconcile. Lone travellers, merchants and similar, are still managing to travel the Empire without trouble. But increasingly whenever large groups of armed citizens from different nations come into contact there are sporadic outbreaks of violence. Previously these issues were confined to military units serving in close formation with the armies, that problem remains potent, but as the split has grown so has the scale of the problem. Now any Imperial armies drawn from opposing sides face a penalty when fighting together.

The armies of the seven nations that have decisively rejected Yael may no longer fight effectively alongside the two nations that have not issued compatible guidance - Dawn and Highguard. The reverse also applies. Dawnish and Highborn armies may not fully cooperate with armies from the seven nations that have rejected Yael. Any Imperial army that is part of a campaign which includes armies from the other side of the schism suffers a 20% penalty to victory points generated during that campaign as the lack of trust damages their ability to fight together.

As before, the Imperial Orcs have no penalty applied, and apply no penalty to other people: their Assembly having convincingly ruled themselves not party to this dispute - for now - and hence their military forces can work effectively with all others.

In addition, in each case, the effective ranks of a military unit choosing to support an army on the other side of the schism will be halved.

## Condemnation

Some citizens who have heard the words of their priests denouncing Yael and urging them to ignore her false teachings have asked why the magistrates have not acted to stop her. Heresy is a crime that can may incur the ultimate punishment - why has nothing been done?

To act the magistrates await the instruction of the Imperial Synod. The Synod rejected the proposed Change of doctrine to incorporate the Land Without Tears and now seven national assemblies have denounced her - but the General Assembly has always stopped short of Condemnation - perhaps aware of the gravitas that such an action carries.

Yael cannot legitimately be condemned by any national assembly bar her own - in theory one of the virtue assemblies could try to condemn her, but given how things have progressed it is difficult to see how such an action would carry much moral weight. The best way to give clear direction to the magistrates that Yael's words are heresy would be for the General Assembly to pass a judgement of condemnation. If that happens, then the magistrates will begin to gather evidence and if they are satisfied that a crime has been committed then they will put Yael to trial.

If the General Assembly cannot agree to take this step then there is another assembly that can act. The Council of Nine is not unanimous on the issue but it has decisively rejected Yael. Like the General Assembly it too can pass a judgement of condemnation should it choose. Such an act would not be without controversy - some will claim that if the General Assembly cannot find the will to condemn Yael then it is wrong for the Council of Nine to circumvent that conflict. Of course some scholars would argue that the reason the Council of Nine exists is precisely so it can act when the situation is clear but the General Assembly is paralyzed by indecision. Whatever the arguments, the legal position is clear - the magistrates would investigate Yael for heresy if she is condemned by either the General Assembly or the Council of Nine.

Yael's defiant words at the previous summit make clear that she understands well what fate likely awaits her if the Synod take this terrible step. She is clearly prepared to die a heretic if the Synod have the will to condemn her as one. What is not clear is what will become of her many followers should the Synod turn on her. It seems unlikely that they will accept the outcome with equanimity, but it is impossible for the civil service to predict how they will respond beyond this obvious point.

## Manifest Destiny

The First Empress is arguably the greatest human hero who has ever lived. By her virtuous actions, she touched the lives of all who followed her, carving out the Empire as her legacy to man and womankind. Many in Highguard longed to celebrate the return of their greatest scion but held back to wait for a signal from their assembly to embrace her. Now that signal has come, the dam has begun to break.

Across Highguard people point to the many signs that a new era is dawning. Reikos is restored - not just reclaimed from the Druj but literally reborn, a paradise waiting for the hand of the Highborn to cultivate it. There is a new Empress on the throne - and now the First Empress has been reborn! This last event has opened the doors to a resurgence of Highborn confidence and self-belief the like of which has not been seen since the founding of the Empire.

The result is a surge in Prosperity right across the nation, benefiting every Highborn resource located in Highguard. The benefits are equivalent to an additional rank for every resource except congregations, lasting for as long as Land Without Tears is embraced by Highguard.

The one grim omen that clouds the future is the failure of the other nations to embrace Yael's revelations. Those Highborn who understand the working of the Imperial Synod understand the dangers this opposition might present - not just to Yael but to all those who have embraced her teachings.

But what is giving some Highborn pause for thought is the theological implications. It is difficult to reconcile acceptance of Yael and the authority of the Synod. What does it mean to the faithful in Highguard if they embrace Yael when the Synod has rejected her? To resolve this conflict, some of her supporters are turning to an old idea - foundationalism.

## FOUNDATIONALISM

Foundationalists are an obscure school of thought within the Way who have long argued that all matters of exemplars and paragons should be decided by the Highguard National Assembly alone. The claim is that as Highguard founded the Way, they alone are able to correctly determine who is best suited to be exemplars. The approach has never been popular outside Highguard... but since the summit it's proponents has taken their views a step further, arguing that as the guardian of faith it is the Highborn Assembly that should have the power to set doctrine, rather than the General Assembly.

Legally the power to change doctrine is in the hands of the General Assembly, nothing the Highborn Assembly can do can change the legal situation (that legal position could only be changed by a Senate motion). The Highborn Assembly cannot change the law - but they can move Highborn hearts and minds - and it is clear that an appropriately worded mandate would cause many more to take up the Foundalist approach - and in doing so give them the ideological basis to ignore the rejection of the Imperial Synod.

**THE HighbORN ASSEMBLY SENDS X WITH 100 DOSES OF LIAO TO  
THE PEOPLE OF HIGHGUARD TO ASSERT THAT THE HighbORN  
ASSEMBLY IS THE SOLE AND ULTIMATE AUTHORITY ON MATTERS  
SPIRITUAL; THAT THEY ALONE MAY RECOGNISE THE PARAGON AND  
THE EXEMPLAR; THAT THEY ALONE MAY SPEAK TO CHANGE THE  
DOCTRINES OF THE FAITH.**

### **HighbORN MANDATE**

Such a mandate would encourage the Highborn people to regard their National Assembly as the highest authority on doctrinal matters. It would render the rejection of Yael's Revelation by the other nations irrelevant to most of Highguard, and make clear that those who do not accept it are not members of the faith whose heart lies in Bastion. It would create a fundamental ideological split within the Empire which could not be easily reversed - but it would also remove the final block standing in the way of widespread acceptance of Yael as the First Empress throughout Highguard.

Recognizing Yael has already begun to have a significant effect - but embracing foundationalism as the ideological underpinning for the Way would have a radical impact on Highborn society. Of course The Way is important to almost everyone who dwells in Highguard, discussions on the nature of virtue are a part of everyday life - but these conversations would become more common and more significant once people view their assembly as the highest authority on such matters. Highborn congregations are already places of faith, but the resulting increase in religious activity means that every other resource in Highguard would gain a single dose of liao each season, to reflect the degree of religious discussion and guidance taking place there.

Such a step is not without risks of course. Those who have not fully embraced Yael point out that it would pose hard questions for the rest of the faithful of the Empire - Bastion has long been regarded as the spiritual heart of the Way. This mandate would put Highguard directly in conflict with the rest of the Empire. If they could not be persuaded to accept Highguards spiritual leadership then the current theological rift would begin to gain new political and legal dimensions. It is possible that if the someone in Highguard refuses to recognise the authority of the General Assembly they could be found guilty of subverting the agencies of the state at which point the proposer of such a mandate might be prosecuted for aiding and abetting the crime.

### **GRANITE FAITH**

If the foundationalist mandate is carried out then there is an opportunity to bolster the ranks of the Granite Pillar. This opportunity can be claimed at any time at this summit - but the army will not see the benefits unless the mandate is carried out.

There are many devout pilgrims of the First Empress in Casinea and Reikos who have been inspired by Yael's words and are prepared to face death for their beliefs. At present their Courage is untapped, but the more experienced soldiers among their number could easily be persuaded to join one of the suitable Highborn armies, that are stationed nearby. Their presence would

not make a significant difference in the Seventh Wave or the Valiant Pegasus but the inclusion of their religious fervour would be transformative if incorporated into the disciplined ranks of the Granite Pillar.

To do so would require the approval of the current general of the Granite Pillar - and would need to be communicated to one or both of the Highborn egregores, so that they can spread the message to the pilgrims. It would take a single season to complete the incorporation of the new soldiers - but once that process was complete the army would gain the following benefits:

### Devoted

Can use the strategic defence order when defending

Can use the crusading assault order when attacking

The Granite Pillar would retain the benefits provided by their current reputation for discipline and precision but they would gain the ability to carry out a crusading assault - allowing them to carry the banner of the First Empress into battle.

### Crusading Assault

If the army is victorious it gains free resupply equal to one-tenth of its strength at the start of the season; this resupply takes place at the end of the season (before determining if the army disbands). Only the strength of the Devoted army (and any appropriate enchantments) is counted for this calculation (the presence of military units does not change the amount of resupply).

This can occur even if the army could not normally benefit from resupply due to not being in an Imperial territory, or being in the presence of enemy armies.

An Imperial army carrying out a crusading assault will inspire humans living in the liberated regions to flock to their banner if they are successful. These citizens would be drawn to join the force by the fervour and religious zeal of those leading it. The reinforcements provided by a successful crusade cannot take the army above their full strength. If the army is not victorious then they do not gain any resupply from this order.

The citizens would remain part of Yael's congregation after they joined the army - the only difference is that their enthusiasm to fight Yael's enemies would now be directed by a Highborn general.

The ability to carry out a crusading assault would be lost if the Highborn ever abandoned the religious and political doctrine of foundationalism.

## BENEFACTION

The Illuminators of Shadow are a small group of scribes and illuminators who operate a scriptorium in Bastion. They make a living copying rare texts but also provide assistance to pilgrims seeking genealogical records while visiting the city. Decades ago they received considerable fame when one of their number, the historian Ahinoam was appointed to be the Imperial Sage (a long defunct position) by Emperor Hugh. Ahinoam was well regarded by the Imperial Synod for her attempts to be a moderating influence of Wisdom on the Emperor and was once talked of as a possible future Empress. She was tragically slain in battle at the peak of her success, having just been granted the right to receive a true liao vision by the Gatekeepers Council, and her order went into decline thereafter.

There are no records of any of the order attending Anvil since Ahinoam's death - so it is somewhat surprising that they have indicated that they intend to attend Anvil this summit bearing some kind of precious gift for the First Empress. They have refused to divulge any details of their gift, but it is likely to be a precious scroll or text of some kind from the scriptorium.

## CONTRITION

There are some voices in Highguard that have not eagerly embraced Yael and the Land Without Tears. Some of these people derisively reject this new expansion of Foundationalism. One of their number, Jerusha of the Black Watch at Marehom, delivers a pointed sermon reminding everyone that the Imperial Synod was the gift that the First Empress gave humanity. She claims that whatever its flaws, no true reincarnation of the First Empress would reject the decision of the Synod, because the essence of faith is to submit to the judgement of that body. In essence, using Yael's rejection of the Synod's decision as evidence that Yael is not in fact the First Empress.

There are few in Highguard in these times who have unquestioning faith in the ability of the Synod to give clear moral guidance to humanity. But even so there are some who question how it can be that Highguard can embrace a woman that most of the Empire have rejected. Crucially they worry where this might lead... In Highguard when they hear talk of secession coming from far flung parts of the Empire they shake their heads at such foolishness... few imagined that such talk might ever take root here where the Empire began.

Those who doubt Yael's claims and those who worry where these new ideas will lead are urging their leaders in the Highborn Assembly to reconsider their decision. Their voices are clearly in the minority - to attempt to renounce Yael would now be expensive and difficult. But if Highguard were overcome with regret the first step to change course would be to pass a suitable statement of principle with a greater majority through the Highborn Assembly denouncing their previous decision. If that happened it would create some opportunities for Highguard to pass expensive mandates to realign their beliefs with those of the rest of the Empire.

## Songs of Glory

At the Winter Solstice the Dawnish Assembly passed a judgement in support of Yael and her revelations, albeit with a lesser majority. Many Dawnish citizens, noble and yeofolk alike were swept up by the romantic vision presented by the songs of the troubadours, of Dawn's First Empress, their greatest monarch, returned from the Land Without Tears to lead the nation to glory once more. But at the Spring Solstice, the nobility of Dawn decisively unfurled their banners behind Empress Lisabetta on the tourney field, crowning her as Queen of Dawn.

There is no fundamental theological conflict here - it is perfectly consistent to embrace Yael as the First Empress reborn whilst accepting that every living soul must achieve glory in their own lifetime. The reflected glory of your previous incarnations urges those who discover it to embrace their own glory - not rest on the laurels of their past lives. Thus it is logical to accept that Yael can return with word of the Land Without Tears - yet still crown Lisabetta as the most glorious living being in the Empire.

But however coherent the theological logic might be, the undeniable truth is that it does not make for the best song... Thus far Dawn has been judged to stand in firm support of Yael and her revelations by those inside and outside the nation. But then the Dawnish National Assembly rejected a mandate to carry the Song of the First Empress to every corner of Dawn. The decision was close, clearly heavily contested, but it has only resulted in the current situation being even more muddled.

Now a number of troubadours have begun to question the situation. A few have even dared to compose some risky verses mocking the situation. So the people of Dawn are looking to their Assembly to settle the matter once and for all... if they can.

## SING THE SONG OF YAEL

All the yeofolk of Dawn dream of glory - and the legend of the First Empress, the last true monarch of Dawn is one of the most popular tales for Dawnish troubadours. It is easy to be inspired by the knowledge that the First Empress, a figure central to

Dawnish identity, now walks among them. Of course some nations have rejected her - but the Imperial Orcs have not disputed her claim and the Highborn know their own. And anyway nobody knows better than the Dawnish that road to glory is rarely paved with the stones of consensus. Dawnish troubadours don't sing songs of earls who did the popular thing everyone agreed needing doing. Glory is a hunt - people remember the spear that slew the boar, not the ones that carried it back.

Last season the Dawnish Assembly rejected a mandate to carry the Song of the First Empress. Such a rejection means that the mandate cannot legally be carried out. But without a greater majority in opposition to Yael the matter is far from settled. Thus the Dawnish Assembly could choose to revisit the mandate if they wished.

We send X with 25 doses of liao to carry the song of the First Empress to every Proud Dawnish man and woman. Let all who hear it know the truth of her glorious return from beyond the Labyrinth."

### Synod Mandate

If the mandate is successful, every personal resource in Dawn owned by a Dawnish character will gain a bonus equal to one additional rank for the following year. This bonus would be doubled if Yael also became the Queen of Dawn. Obviously that outcome is unlikely given recent events but only the glorious live forever...

Crucially such a decision would convincingly demonstrate that Dawn stands in support of Yael as the First Empress, putting them firmly in the same camp as their neighbours in Highguard.

## SOUND A NOTE OF REJECTION

The alternative approach would be to reject Yael and her revelation. The quickest way to achieve this would be to pass a mandate rejecting Yael's teachings as many other nations have now done.

The national assembly sends X with X doses of liao to repudiate the false teachings of Yael of Highguard. Those who have been deceived by her claim to be the First Empress Reborn and the hope of a Land Without Tears should renounce this false doctrine and return to their homes.

### Synod Mandate

This would enable a troubadour to travel to Highguard and try to convince those Dawnish folk who have travelled there to support Yael to return home. This mandate would end the movement of pilgrims seeking Yael from Dawn, reducing the size and influence of that congregation. Crucially the mandate would also make clear that Dawn does not support Yael and rejects her revelations of the Land Without Tears.

If this mandate is passed then the Dawnish would then be treated as one of the nations that have rejected the First Empress for purposes of support from military units. If the mandate is enacted (if the liao is supplied and used) then Dawn would be treated as one of the nations that have rejected the First Empress for purposes of cooperation between armies of different nations on campaign.

If the Dawnish national assembly chooses to pass both mandates... then whichever mandate utilizes the most liao will carry the day. If they pass neither mandate, then the current situation, aligning them with Yael and the Highborn will continue.

# DOWN ALONG THE COVE

## Overview

In recent years, the Bay of Catazar has been subjected to a significant amount of Spring magic, as well as several large-scale enchantments drawing on Night magic. As the Summer solstice draws near, an unexpected, beneficial side effect rears its fishy head - a population boom among the creatures of the sea. Fisherfolk across the Bay of Catazar are eager to embrace the opportunity this provides - yet ironically that same opportunity is drawing independent Grendel ship captains in droves.

## Significance

Feroz, Madruga, Necropolis, Sarvos, and (to a degree) Redoubt and Tassato draw at least a portion of their prosperity from the sea. The increase in fish and sea animal populations offers opportunities for enterprising boat captains an opportunity to deliver bumper catches. Those who are prepared to take a few risks - to push out into the deeper, non-territorial waters - stand to make a significant amount of money. This in turn offers entrepreneurs an opportunity for prosperity. Whether they deal in fish, fish oil, whale meat, ambergris, or even ilium, the marine population boom provides opportunities for entrepreneurs..

The problem is the Grendel. While the Grendel navies are engaged in the Spiral campaign, there are a large number of orc captains who are the equivalent of the heroic fleet captains of the Empire - and they also have an eye for the main chance. So many Imperial fisherfolk taking risks provide an appealing opportunity to the enterprising Grendel to seize ships' crews, boats, and hard-earned cargo. While many of them prepare to invade the Isle of Zemress, others must surely be looking with hungry eyes towards the adventurous fishing boats of the Empire.

## Protecting the Fishing Fleet

As Imperial fisher folk take greater risks in return for greater profits, so too the Grendel are taking greater risks. They are less interested in the fish that are being dredged up than they are in skilled fisherfolk slaves, valuable boats, and the occasional highly profitable lump of ilium dragged up from the new fishing grounds. As such, there is a real risk that it will be the Grendel who will most benefit from this opportunity, not the Empire.

With this in mind, the Fellowship of Purple Sails (interested as they are in all things nautical), have come together with a several Freeborn corsair families, prominent paradors in Feroz and Madruga, and League guilds involved with fishing and its byproducts. Together, they are offering an additional incentive to protect the entrepreneurial fishing fleet.

## PARTICIPATION

The privateering action represents Imperial fleets attacking barbarians who stray into Imperial waters. In the coming season, there will be an additional option accessible through the Privateering dropdown menu - Protect the fishing fleet. This may be taken by any fleet owner, and represents committing a fleet specifically to protect the fisherfolk of the Bay of Catazar.

Each standard fleet assigned to the "Protect the fishing fleet" action effectively adds 100 points toward successful resolution of the opportunity. Each additional rank for an ungraded or enchanted fleet adds another 20 points. Rituals and other effects that increase the ranks of a privateering fleet (such as Blood and Salt) will increase the effective strength for purposes of this special action. In a similar manner to a spy network, the total strength assigned to the opportunity will decide the outcome.

- If less than 1000 points of strength are assigned, the Grendel successfully raid the Imperial fishing fleet. This will result in a one-fifth loss in the production of every business in Madruga, Feroz, Sarvos, Necropolis, Redoubt, and Tassato. Perhaps more importantly, the Grendel are not just interested in stealing the cargo of the targeted ships. They will enslave crews and steal or destroy boats as well. The resulting loss of resources will cause a small but noticeable permanent drop in the tax revenue of Madruga, Feroz, Sarvos, Redoubt, and Necropolis as well. (OOC Note: The loss of



fishing boats will mean there are fewer resources in the territories to be taxed; this loss will not effect Tassato directly and will be most severe in Madruga, Feroz and Sarvos).

- If at least 1000 points of strength are assigned to the "Protect the fishing fleet" action, the fisherfolk are protected and the Empire receives a small benefit - every business in Madruga, Feroz, Sarvos, Necropolis, Redoubt, and Tassato will receive an additional 72 rings production.
- If at least 2000 points of strength are assigned, the fisherfolk are protected, the Grendel are driven off, and the Empire benefits as above. Additionally, there will be an increase in the amount of ilium available through the public auction during the Autumn Equinox, dredged up in nets alongside the bumper hauls of fish.
- If at least 3000 points of strength are assigned, the fisherfolk and are protected, the Grendel are driven off, the Empire benefits, and there will be more ilium available through the public auction, as above. In addition, the grateful boat owners of the Bay of Catazar will provide an additional portion of the ilium they catch in their nets to the Broken Shore Bounty, increasing the income from that Bourse seat by 2 extra rings for a year, starting at the Autumn Equinox. This will also send a clear message to the Grendel opportunists - that the Empire's fisherfolk are protected. This is not without a potential downside, however. The Grendel vessels currently looking for easy prey among the fisherfolk are instead likely to turn their attention to ships passing through the southern bay, potentially leading to problems next season for ships engaging in foreign trade.

## REWARDS

Any fleet so assigned will also receive the normal benefits of undertaking the privateering action. The additional incentives offered by the loose alliance of maritime concerns around the Bay means that any Imperial fleet that takes the "Defend the Fishing Fleet" action will receive an additional 3 crowns as a bounty from the grateful folk of the Bay of Catazar.

It also counts as taking a privateering action for Freeborn captains for purposes of determining the Broken Shore Bounty.

## Courage, Prosperity, and Vigilance

The Empire is committed to ensuring the prosperity of the courageous fisherfolk on the Bay of Catazar. The duty of doing so falls on the heads of Imperial fleet captains. The (Assembly) sends X with X liao to encourage those able to do so to embrace this opportunity, secure in the knowledge that the ship captains of the Empire will defend them.

- synod mandate

Any of the national assemblies, the General Assembly, the Prosperity assembly, and/or the Courage Assembly may all choose to pass this judgement of mandate.

If a national assembly passes the mandate with a lesser majority, and assigns at least 25 liao, any fleet captain from that nation who engages in any action except "Protect the fishing fleet" has their production and effective strength reduced by a fifth. This will reduce their effectiveness when engaging in foreign trade, supporting a navy, privateering, or participating another special opportunity (such as Shelter from the storm).

If the Prosperity Assembly, the Courage Assembly, or the General Assembly passes this mandate with a lesser majority, and at least 50 doses of liao, then all Imperial captains who engage in any other action will suffer the penalty.

While wealth is appealing, it is often dangerous to pursue of it. The Imperial Synod sends X with X liao to encourage the fisherfolk of the Bay of Catazar to be vigilant and cautious, avoiding the perils of foolish bravado and the dangerous pursuit of unnecessary wealth.

## - synod mandate

The General Assembly, or the Assembly of Vigilance may pass this alternate mandate. If the mandate is passed with a lesser majority, and at least 75 liao is assigned, then this entire opportunity is cancelled. Instead of seeking out rich fishing opportunities, fisherfolk are more cautious and stay close to shore. There is no special option to defend the fishing fleet - because it keeps to safe waters and ignores the opportunity to gain additional wealth. At the same time there is no benefit to the businesses of territories along the Bay of Catazar, and no opportunity to secure additional ilium. On the other hand, the Grendel will be denied the opportunity to strike at the fishing fleet, and there will be no risk of damage to the Imperial treasury (however slight it may actually be).

As always, in the case of competing mandates (whether specific to this opportunity or otherwise) the one with the most liao assigned will take precedence. If the second mandate passes, all liao assigned by different groups to the first mandate will be totalled to determine which takes precedence.

# NOT DARK YET

## Overview

Over the last six months, several national assemblies have expressed opinions on the nature of the Iron Helms - the third Varushkan army recently restored to full strength and deployed in service of the Empire. The Throne has also weighed in, with messages carrying a statement on the subject written by Empress Lisabetta to all.

Even before their action against the rebel Dogri Thulebane in Skarsind, the Wintermark, Marcher, and Freeborn Assemblies had condemned them. After their successful apprehension of Dogri, and the suppression of his rebellion, the Varushkan and Navarr assemblies expressed clear support for the Iron Helms, and the validity of their sometimes unpalatable tactics.

## Significance

As a result of the actions of the Iron Helms, and in particular the statements of principle made on the matter, there are now opportunities for several national assemblies to issue a mandate to encourage their citizens to react appropriately.

## At High Price, But Not Any Price

In Winter 380YE, the Freeborn and Marchers denounced the Iron Helms in judgements passed by their national assemblies with a greater majority. They declared the use of extreme cruelty, even against the enemies of the Empire, to be unacceptable. The Wintermark assembly echoed their words - and while their judgement did not receive a greater majority, that season the Iron Helms went on to arrest Dogri Thulebane and destroy Crow's Keep. They may not have shown their true cruelty during that engagement, but few Winterfolk relish the idea of dying at the jaws of savage hounds.

This season past, the Iron Helms fought in the Mourn, their general ordering a merciless onslaught against the Jotun forces seeking to try and break them with their use of the most cruel tactics imaginable. Those Winterfolk, Freeborn, and Marchers who saw them were reminded of the warnings of their national assemblies. Here at last was clear evidence of the unspeakable savagery of the Iron Helms - on display for all to see. Now all the soldiers of these nations are looking to their priests for advice on how they should respond to this barbarism.

Each national assembly may now 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 by a national assembly, then regardless of what orders are given by the generals of the Military Council the soldiers of their nation 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, national assembly

If this mandate is enacted then for the next year, if the Iron Helms are deployed in a territory alongside a Imperial army from a nation that has passed this mandate, 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 the mandate that are present in the territory. Thus, if the Marches, Wintermark, and the Freeborn all pass this mandate, and the Iron Helms were engaged in a territory where there were armies from the Marches, the Brass Coast, and Wintermark, the Varushkan army would suffer a penalty of three-tenths to victory points.

## THE THULEBANE'S LEGACY

For some in Wintermark, the cruelty of the Iron Helms is more than just unvirtuous, it is an insult to their heroism. Dogri Thulebane made clear he would have surrendered to a Wintermark army had they be sent to Crows Keep to take him. Instead the dogs of the Iron Helms stormed his castle and slew his people and then the Helms carried him in chains to Anvil. That he died as he should have, a hero fighting the barbarians, is no thanks to the Iron Helms.

It is one thing to show the Iron Helms the disdain and contempt that their actions have earned them - but a better way to honour the Thulebane - and indeed all the great figures of Wintermark's past is to show the Varushkans how a real warrior fights. Not by impaling people on stakes or setting your dogs on them - but as a hero - with weapons in hand - unbowed before the storm.

No true hero of the Mark should stand with the Iron Helms - those who use their dogs for war have become dogs themselves. The assembly sends X with 50 doses of liao to urge every hero of Wintermark to show them the heroism that a true hero of the Empire should aspire to.

Synod Mandate, Wintermark Assembly

If the Wintermark Assembly passes this mandate then it will automatically incorporate all the benefits of the first mandate urging people to shun the Iron Helms - but in addition for the next year the general of any Wintermark army that fights alongside the Iron Helms may choose to give the order for a triumphant charge or final stand.

## A WEEVIL IN THE GRAIN

The Marcher Assembly has made clear that while the Jotun are their mortal enemies, there is no place for Hatred in this fight. The Assembly of Wisdom can claim it is virtuous to impale people on spikes, but "A stool stinks just as bad no matter what you call it" - as the saying goes. Torturing the Jotun to break their spirit looks an awful lot like Hate to those who had the misfortune to encounter the false virtue up close recently.

What is needed is some good old fashioned Marcher common sense and fair play. The Jotun might have taken Marcher lands - and no good Marcher will rest while their land is ruled by another - but they never did a cruel deed to a Marcher for the sake of it. The Marchers could choose to take a stand and show everyone in the Mournewold, Jotun, Varushkan, Mournewolder, that there is more to war than body counts.

The Iron Helms have shown their cruelty. As our assembly has said time and again although the Jotun are our enemies, we do not Hate them and we will shun those who do. The Marcher assembly sends X with 50 doses of liao to urge all good Marchers to fight for every inch of their land but not an inch more. If the Jotun pull back - we let 'em go with our blessing."

Synod Mandate, Marcher Assembly

If the Marcher Assembly passes this mandate then it will automatically incorporate all the benefits of the first mandate urging people to shun the Iron Helms - but in addition, for the next year any Marcher army that fights the Jotun will inflict 20% less casualties. The change of tactics that causes this loss of casualties will be apparent to everyone present in the territory where the campaign takes place.

## Actions have Consequences

The Navarr assembly has expressed their support for the Iron Helms, and for the people of Varushka. They have made it clear that they consider the merciless cruelty of the Varushkans not only effective, but also virtuous. While this statement of principle did not achieve a greater majority, it has prompted further discussion among the Navarr - as have the recent tactics of General

Brennos Brackensong of the Quiet Step in the Mournwold. Now there is an opportunity to pass a mandate that would allow the general of the army to seize an opportunity to permanently embrace similar tactics.

Mercy is a luxury that the Empire cannot afford when faced with enemies that seek to destroy it; we must not cast aside any weapon that may bring victory. The Navarr assembly sends X with 75 doses of liao to urge the Quiet Step to build on the opportunity presented by Arhallogen, and find new and effective tactics for dealing with our enemies.

### Synod Mandate

If the Navarr assembly enact this mandate this season, then at the following summit, the General of the Quiet Step can include instructions for their troops to focus on developing new tactics, and recruiting apothecaries versed in the creation of blade venoms, as part of their normal order submission. If the general can supplement this with 50 wains of weirwood then the quality of the Quiet Step will permanently shift from scouting to Cunning. (The general should ensure the wains of weirwood are in their inventory, then e-mail Profound Decisions after the event).

Cunning: Can use the Whatever it takes order when attacking

A cunning army contains soldiers adept at employing unorthodox - but effective - tactics. The force makes great use of venom and poison (both mundane and magical), as well as setting traps and luring enemies into ambushes. They take advantage of situations where an ally has engaged an enemy to launch surprise attacks against their weak spots, taking particular pains to kill enemy healers, magicians, and supply trains.

Whatever it takes

- All casualties inflicted by this army are increased by a tenth.
- All casualties suffered by this army are increased by a tenth.
- All casualties inflicted by allied armies in the same territory who have issued attacking orders are increased by a tenth.

The army employs vicious tactics to set up ambushes, lay traps, and kill high-value targets such as healers and magicians. The army takes every opportunity to punish their opponents. At the same time, they weaken and distract their enemies, so that their allies can gain the opportunity to kill front line troops.

## Hard Land, Hard Choices

### FUCK YOU THEN!

The Military Council might want Varushkan assistance to deal with their Jotun problem, but the people of Wintermark, the Marches and the Brass Coast seem to feel it is appropriate to dictate terms for the nature of that aid. Perhaps they are well positioned to resolve the problem of the Jotun by themselves and the Varushkans should leave them to it... Everyone seems to swallow this myth of that the Jotun are some kind of honourable enemy, but presumably people are not so unwise when faced off against the Druj. Better to urge the Varushkan armies to turn east and face an enemy that they can fight without some wet-behind-the-ears childling trying to tie their hands.

Wintermark, the Marchers and the Brass Coast have made it clear that they do not want Varushkan aid in their battles against the Jotun. The Varushkan assembly sends X with 25 doses of liao to remind the people of Varushka that we do not fight to protect those who do not want our assistance. There are other threats facing our people, let us fight where our aid is welcome.

## Synod Mandate, Varushkan Assembly

If the Varushkan assembly passes this mandate, they make it clear that if the Wintermark, Freeborn, and Marchers do not want their help, they do not have to have it. With the resurgence of the Druj in the east, Karsk is once again directly threatened by orc barbarians - the same barbarian forces that have attacked Dawn and Urizen. For the next year, every Varushkan army will suffer a penalty of 20% to the victory points it generates in any battle against the Jotun, and no Varushkan general can issue the Overwhelming Assault, Heroic Stand, or Solid Defence orders while fighting in the Mournwold, Liathaven, or in any Jotun, Marcher, Wintermark, or Brass Coast territory. However any Varushkan army receives a 10% bonus to its ability to defend territory if it takes any defending order in Therunin, the Barrens, or in any current or former territory of Varushka, Urizen, or Dawn.

## WE HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED

Varushka is a hard land, and the people who live there are more familiar than perhaps any other Imperial nation with the danger of excessive mercy, and the lure of easy answers. The Varushkan assembly has made very plain that it supports the Iron Helms, that they are scions of Varushka, a deadly weapon forged in a deadly land. There is no need for a mandate to show the support of the Varushkans for their general and for their soldiers - the assembly has spoken.

Now that the Druj have done what everyone knew the Druj would do, a quick victory against the Jotun is more needed than ever. Varushkans aren't cruel for the sake of it - but the harsh truth that nobody wants to admit is that every Jotun impaled on a spike is one less Imperial going to an early grave. And yet still people bleat like lambs at the slaughter and accusations of a lack of virtue fly...

Well then - why not show them what Varushka can really do. There are worse fates than being impaled on spikes, there are worse ends than being eaten by dogs. Those who think that's bad would be well advised not to wander abroad at night in the far north.

The Iron Helms only do what is necessary to defeat their enemies quickly. We do not have the luxury of mercy when facing what comes out of the darkness. The Assembly sends X with 100 doses of liao to urge every inhabitant of Varushka to seize the opportunity to support the Iron Helms and show the enemies of the Empire what real cruelty looks like.

## Synod Mandate, Varushkan Assembly

If this mandate is enacted, then until the beginning of the Spring Equinox 382YE, all manner of dark spirits will travel with the Iron Helms. Varushkan cabals who spend their time in service to sovereigns rather than travelling to Anvil will attend the army, along with wolves and other fell beings. For as long as the effect lasts, the general of the Iron Helms will have the opportunity to issue the order "Terror in the Night". This order will require 25 mana crystals, to power fell magics that send night terrors to invade the Jotun's dreams and drive them mad. Thus far the Iron Helms have only managed to kill those Jotun they can get their hands on... but that's only a limit if you let it be...

Of course such a tactic is likely to cause even more unhappiness from those who cry tears for the Jotun. Such an order will be an act of cruelty that will make putting the Jotun on spikes look like a school lesson at the Academy. It will not be pleasant... what it will be is effective...

## Terror in the Night

Requires 25 mana crystals

An enemy force that takes casualties from this army will break if their military strength falls below 2,000 (or below 3,000 if they are large)

In addition to the cruel actions involved in a merciless onslaught, the army uses dark magics and calls on the fell powers that lurk in the dark places of Varushka to terrorize their enemies, invading their dreams and driving them into madness.

If the Varushkan assembly were to successfully pass both judgements, then the Iron Helms would not be able to issue the Terror in the Night order in any area they would not be able to issue the Overwhelming Assault, Heroic Stand, or Solid Defence orders (that is, while fighting in the Mournwold, Liathaven, or in any Jotun, Marcher, Wintermark, or Brass Coast territory).

## Limited Opportunity

These mandates are only available at the Summer Solstice 381YE. While some of them may take a little longer to play out, the option is only available if the mandate is enacted in the appropriate assembly during the event, and the correct amount of liao provided in the downtime period following.

# PAY IN BLOOD

## Overview

Shortly after the Spring Equinox, magicians across the Empire begin to report problems performing ritual magic. It soon becomes apparent that it is only Spring rituals that are affected and only those that are attempted using a regio. Magicians in Urizen quickly identify that their Spring regios have lost their power entirely. Winged messengers fly back and forth across the Empire but this communion only confirms the worst. All the regios of the Empire have been affected - no Imperial magician is able to call on the power of the regio to power a Spring ritual.

Initially, magicians are at a loss to explain the phenomena. If this is some fell curse it is not revealed by the Wisdom of the Balanced Blade - indeed it seems impossible to discern with any form of magical divination. Eventually though, historians pouring over books of magic discover a description of a similar event from the reign of Empress Deanne. Apparently, during her reign, a formal parley between the Archmage of Winter and representatives of the eternal Wendigo (then under enmity for ... well the usual reasons) was disrupted by Highborn magisters. In the excitement, both representatives of the eternal were destroyed.

Within a week of their destruction, Imperial magicians found it impossible to access the power of Winter regio. The magicians of the time tried everything imaginable to resolve the problem - but there was simply nothing that could be done but endure the loss. Even those regio in foreign lands were closed to them... though they functioned as normal for others.

The catastrophic state persisted for a year before it finally abated. Eventually the power of the regio returned four seasons later as if nothing had happened. The research carried out at the time indicated that that this was the "terrible price" paid by the Empire for disrupting a formal parley. The reports say that the year was plagued by reports of a surge in activity by agents of the Howler in the Wastes although whether that was a result of the magical effect or just Wendigo causing trouble was never established with any certainty.

## Significance

Citizens of the Empire have lost the ability to draw on the power of Spring regio. The regio are still there, as are the portals at their hearts which can be used freely, but Imperial citizens cannot access their power to work ritual magic.

This has two primary effects.

Firstly, 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.

Secondly, 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.

These disadvantages apply to Imperial magicians everywhere - even regio in conquered territories such as Liathaven are affected. However, they only

apply to Imperial citizens - nothing will prevent a coven of Thule (for example) from using a Spring regio inside the borders of the Empire.



Furthermore, these disadvantages apply to any attempt to use a regio. For example, the ritual targeting ability of the Citadel Guard to focus a Spring ritual into a territory as if it were at a Spring regio there will not overcome this problem. Using a ritual such as Align the Celestial Net to transform a regio into a Spring regio will not work. Any object or magical effect that allows a ritual to be performed as if a coven were at a strong Spring regio will fail. And so forth.

How long this problem will persist is unknown at this time. It is likewise also unknown if there are any actions the Empire can take to reduce or remove the effect.

# ROCKS AND GRAVEL

## Overview

A little over a month after the Spring Equinox a large section of north-western Goldglades in Miaren ... disappeared. With an almighty roar, a section half a mile across simply collapsed. Goldglades is one of the richest part of Miaren, and the loss of life could have been very high indeed - but there was some warning. Several vates apparently foresaw the danger in the Pool of Silver Clouds, and were able to deliver warnings to those in the effected area. Not everyone listened of course - but the Navarr are by nature a people prepared to move when the need arises.

After the initial collapse, the hole began to spread. Warnings were sent to Birchland in Upwold, to the Vardstein Vales in Temeschwar, and to Wood Heath in Hahnmark. Not a moment too soon - less than a day after the first Navarr messengers reached Woodhall in the far south-west of Hahnmark, the ground opened up beneath the hall literally swallowing it whole. Without timely action by the thane in response to the warnings, several hundred people might have been swallowed alongside it.

Over the next month, chaos reigned. Sinkholes opened in south-eastern Temeschwar, and in north-eastern Upwold. Eastern Guard was evacuated of all save a bare bones garrison too stubborn to abandon their post, and for several weeks there was real concern that this old fortress might go the way of Woodhall.

The last great collapse took place three weeks ago; a significant part of the Vardstein Vales slid into the widening hole. Since then, there has been no further collapse. A small team of civil service surveyors (among many others) have visited the area and confirmed that the collapse appears to have stopped, at least for now, and folk are gingerly returning to the area.

Where the four territories once met, there is now a massive sinkhole. It is estimated to be seven hundred feet deep, with a lake at the bottom that may well be bottomless. The cliff walls are nearly vertical, and still prone to collapse in some places, but there are also signs of caves and tunnels opening out in several places. Initial explorers have excitedly reported what look to be ancient mine workings - some reaching back to the time of the Terunael, and some reaching back even further. The full extent of the network of caverns here has yet to be determined. More worryingly, some of the early daredevils who have made a preliminary investigation of some of the more accessibly caves and tunnels have failed to return - and all those who have made it back in one piece have described encounters with particularly angry trogoni - creatures rarely encountered outside of the mountains of Urizen, and the northern peaks of Wintermark and Varushka.

## Significance

The giant hole in the ground has some profound implications for the strategic map of the Empire, as well as (in the short term) for the population of the four effected regions. It also presents an opportunity for adventure, wealth ... and danger.

## Strategic Implications

The massive sinkhole is a natural hazard that affects the movement of Imperial armies. The territories of Miaren and Hahnmark are no longer considered adjacent; likewise, it is no longer possible for a campaign army to move from Temeschwar to Upwold and vice-versa. This is a permanent change.

## Weltsilver Bounty

The civil service reports massive stockpiles of weltsilver stored in the exposed tunnels - it seems likely that this were gathered here from the ancient mine workings for some reason. Now that they have been exposed they are literally just lying there for the taking. The only problem is the trogoni - these dangerous creatures infest the tunnels in large numbers. They don't care

about the weltsilver - trogoni feast on mana crystals (and occasionally tempest jade). The ones living here seem to ignore the weltsilver and instead roam the tunnels looking for the natural mana crystals that slowly form here. But they will attack anyone who comes close.

Thus the only practical way to get the weltsilver is to send small detachments of soldiers - military units - into the tunnels in search of it.

## PARTICIPATION

Each standard military unit assigned adds 100 strength to the opportunity. Each additional rank the military unit possesses adds another 20 strength. Rituals and other effects that make a military unit more effective at paid work apply their benefits normally to the effective ranks. Once downtime closes, we will determine the outcome based on the total effective strength of all assigned military units - but in this case the more strength that is assigned the opportunity the more dangerous it becomes..

The problem is that if too many military units sent into the tunnels they are likely to rouse the trogoni to such a level that they boil out of the tunnels and attack the surrounding regions. That would then require an Imperial army to deal with - which given the current military situation might be very expensive indeed.

- As long as the total effective military strength assigned to this opportunity each season remains less than 2500, then according to civil service divination, there will be no problem. At this level the trogoni response will be muted and can be easily managed by those involved.
- If the total effective strength is at least 2500 but less than 3500 in any season, then the impact would be felt by the surrounding regions. The trogoni would boil out of the tunnels in sufficient numbers that they would threaten nearby defenders causing the loss of a quarter of the production of mines, forests, farms, and businesses in the four territories that abut the sinkhole, and a 50% penalty to any mana sites in the affected territories.
- If the total effective strength is 3500 or greater in any season, then the trogoni will swarm out of the tunnels together. Although they are not an army, at that point they will be large enough to be equivalent to one. This force would move as one, attacking one of the four territories nearest the hole, driving off the inhabitants. In practical terms the consequences will be indistinguishable from having a small army of trogoni attacking and conquering the neighbouring territories from the sinkhole. At that point the situation will be so bad that independent military units acting alone will not be able to stop the trogoni - and it will require an army to eliminate the threat.

Provided the involvement of Imperial military units remains below the critical threshold for the next two seasons, the problem should then abate. Most of the weltsilver is likely to have been recovered by then and returns will have dropped to the point that it is no longer worth the danger. The trogoni population will have been depleted by encounters with the raiders and while there will always be some creatures living in the tunnels it is unlikely to become an ongoing problem.

### Rewards

The rewards for such an action will be impressive; any military unit assigned to the tunnels in the coming seasons is going to come away with at least 16 ingots of weltsilver - and more if it is enchanted or upgraded.

In addition, we assume that small NPC military units and groups of entrepreneurs will explore the tunnels, meaning an increase in the amount of weltsilver on the public auction for the next six months.

## Destruction

The area affected by the sinkhole is prosperous and rich in resources - many of which have now been destroyed by the subsidence. The lands around Dunhearth Hall in Hahnmark are known to have been particularly badly hit. Those who are

affected by the destruction may wish to pursue a claim to the bounty that lies under their lands - if the magistrates are not able to help then they will need to seek a resolution from the Senate.

There will be a temporary impact on taxation returns for the Empire in the following seasons until things are rebuilt and people have recovered.

## Possession

The Imperial Senate could choose to take action regarding the sinkhole. At present there is no way to know which military units are attempting to loot the place. The Senate could pass a motion to instruct the civil service to observe the area - that would cost money but would allow the Senate some ability to respond to the situation, as the civil service compile a list of who has looted the sinkhole.

Alternatively the Senate might pass a motion to control access to the bounty or determine who it belonged to. Getting good legal advice from the magistrates office before submitting should be sufficient to ensure that any sensible motion was free from constitutional concerns.

## Lancing the Boil

If the Imperial Military Council consider the situation at the sinkhole is too precarious, then they could address the crisis directly by sending one or more armies to any of the four territories with orders to attack the trogoni. Day mages investigating the hole estimate that the effective strength of the trogoni creatures is equal to a small campaign force of around 2500 strength, which would be defeated if reduced to 1000 strength.

If the trogoni were destroyed, the generals leading the force would then be free to claim the huge bounty of weltsilver for the Empire. There would be no further threat from the trogoni in this area. Any possible encounters in the future would only be with small numbers of individuals - the sort of thing a band of brave heroes could deal with - not something you would need an army to resolve.

If an army engages the trogoni directly then they will be pinned in place while they fight the army, regardless of how many military units are looting the weltsilver at the time. However, if any army attacks the trogoni but does not destroy them and then moves away next season so that the trogoni are not engaged - then they will automatically boil out of their hole to attack the surrounding area exactly as described above if an effective strength of 3500 had attempted to loot the tunnels.

Additionally, if the general of foraging army were to take the plunder order in the area - then the force could be directed to plunder the mines (and if desired, to avoid plundering anywhere else). Such a force would gain an increased share of the weltsilver available, but also be able to grab other treasures from the tunnels, including (but not limited to) some of the mana crystals growing there.

# SERIES OF DREAMS

## THE EMPTY SKIES

THE STARS ARE HIDDEN ACROSS MOST OF THE EMPIRE AND NEARBY TERRITORIES, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO PERFORM SCRYING MAGIC AND EXERTING AN ODD INFLUENCE ON THOSE OF THE NAGA LINEAGE.

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

The night skies are clear over Morrow, Spiral, Redoubt, and Skarsind. While the "empty sky" phenomenon has been removed from Zenith as well, Urizen inhabitants report that a Penumbra Veil has recently settled over the territory - no doubt conjured by the Druj invaders

## CALM AFTER THE STORM

THE SUPERNATURAL STORM THAT CLOAKED THE ICY CRAG OF THE ETERNAL SUN HAS ABATED.

The Icy Crag of the Eternal Storm is a college dedicated to the study of Summer magic. In Winter 380YE, just after construction was completed, a rivalry between Cathan Canae and Meraud (eternals of the Summer realm) boiled over, resulting in a terrible supernatural storm that cloaked the college regardless of what the weather was elsewhere, dramatically increasing the costs to run it.

The night after the Summer solstice, the magical storm ended as suddenly as it had blown up. It is believed that the Archmage of Summer negotiated with Cathan Canae to rescind her curse, and that some form of contest will take place to determine who is worthy to be the patron of the college. By all accounts, the Summer eternals are taking this challenge quite seriously. It is likely that whoever wins the right to serve as patron, they will want to put their own stamp on the college, possibly by offering assistance to the Master of the college in researching certain types of ritual.

Regardless of who wins, it is also very likely that after a while one eternal or another will be dissatisfied with the current arrangement, and seek to challenge the current patron again - but at least a method of resolving the issue of who patronizes the college has been established without any further damage to the walls or the faculty!

## THE EMPRESS OF ALL GOATS THEATRE

A SMALL THEATRE HAS BEEN BUILT BY MAGICAL CREATURES IN THE VALE OF VERESK.

A fortnight after the Summer Solstice, a gang of twenty koboldi - the servants of the eternal known in the Empire as King Adamant - arrive in Veresk in Karsk. Their foreman, a slender koboldi with brilliant golden scales, politely informs the bemused boyar and the circle of wise ones that they have been sent by Barien, and request permission to build something they call "The Empress of All Goats Theatre". There is a great deal of confusion, until a sheepish fellow by the name of Hubert Annanovich Gremani admits that he might know something about it all. The koboldi are delighted to see him - it is for Hubert that they have been engaged to perform their building work.

After an evening of fast-talking, the boyar grudgingly gives the koboldi permission to enter. Over the next week, working with the supernatural focus and attention to detail for which they are known, they build a small theatre over the site of Hubert's home (the playwright is forced to take shelter at a nearby Navarr wayhouse as the first act of the little draconic heralds is to demolish his home and garden). On the morning of the eighth day, they deliver a small golden key to Hubert, bow politely, and disappear back whence they came.

Built in a vaguely Temeschwari style, the "The Empress of All Goats Theatre" is apparently Hubert's reward for completing a Challenge the Iron Duke. As news spreads of this magical building, interest grows. Rumour suggests Hubert has already received several enquiries about when the first performance will be, presumably meaning that his retirement will be significantly more eventful than he might have perhaps expected.

## THE GREEN CASTLE

### THE ETERNAL LLOFIR CONTINUES TO CLAIM TAMARBODE IN REIKOS.

Since the eternal Llofir claimed Tamarbode, it has been largely terra incognita for Imperial citizens. The only part of it that remains accessible to Imperial citizens is the mana site known as Tamar's Toes - and those responsible for gathering the mana continue to recount eerie stories of their experiences in the forest there. They talk of being watched by peculiar creatures, of their clothes being infested with unfamiliar rusts and moulds, and of the brooding presence of the supernatural fortress that looms over everything.

The fortification itself is a structure - if such a word is appropriate - worthy of note. It grows at the heart of the Sign of Tamar, completely encompassing the powerful Spring regio there. Its shape does not appear constant - perhaps unsurprising for a castle of living fungus raised by the magic of an eternal. Over the course of each season it ages and changes colour - from a pale bone whiteness at the start of the season to a deep red russet colour at the end - but each Solstice and Equinox it is renewed. It shows no sign of going away.

As before, there is no suggestion that the servants of Llofir have any interest in leaving the magical forest that now fills the region. Both Highborn magisters and Navarr vates in regions bordering Tamarbode agree that whatever else one might say about Llofir, it is interested in the long game.

## OTHER CASTLES

### THE ETERNAL FAMILY OF NAVARR HAVE RAISED A FROZEN CITADEL IN KAHRAMAN

### THE SUSSIVARI FROST COVEN HAVE RAISED MULTIPLE DRIPPING ECHOES OF THE FEN IN BREGASLAND

Magical fortifications are a powerful weapon in the Empire's arsenal. This season, a keep of black ice was raised above Serra Damata in Kahraman. At the same time, a blanket of fog and whispers settled over Grey Fens and Ottermire in Bregasland. All three citadels would have offered aid in resisting any potential invasion of these territories by the Jotun. Fortunately, no such attack materialised, and the castles faded back into the magic from which they had been called.

## RIBBON OF EMBERS

### THE RIBBON OF SALT, TRANSFORMED TO A FOUNTAIN OF EMBERS, HAS SENT AN EXPLOSIVE BURST OF NIGHT MAGIC OVER REDOUBT.

The Ribbon of Salt is a famous Spring regio sited under the waters off the port-spires of Visten in Redoubt, known for regular eruptions that took the form of a great waterspout. In the weeks leading up to the Spring Equinox, these explosions became unpredictable, and the eruptions themselves were of a shorter duration, but much more intense and destructive in nature. During the Equinox itself, tremors began to emanate from the submarine regio, alarming seers and stargazers alike with the fear that the Ribbon was building up magical energies at an alarming rate. On the last day of the Equinox, the Ribbon of Salt exploded with immense force.

However, rather than an eruption of raw Spring magic the Ribbon vomited forth a swirling torrent of shadows, embers, flame and whispers; a storm of emotions, half-memories, snatches of strange secrets and wreathing mists. A team of heroic Urizeni had traveled to the regio's heart, and realigned it to the realm of Night moments before the detonation.

Even though the influence of the ritual normally fades at sunrise, the energies of the regio do not return to Spring. Scholars who study the Ribbon are at a loss to explain what has happened. Some hypothesise that the recent weakening of Spring regios across the Empire may be to blame, with no easy access to the tumultuous heart of the regio they can do little more than speculate.

Over the months following the Equinox, the regio slowly subsides to the occasional spuming vent of ash and embers. Some of those who live nearby report peculiar dreams and occasional odd phenomena in the water or in the skies, but for the most part the magic appears to have dissipated harmlessly.

Out on the waters of the coast, though, the impact of the Ribbon's eruption is strongest - which is where the Freeborn Storm is this season. The ships of the Brass Coast steer clear of the gout of shadow and fire, but they do not avoid the more subtle influence of the pillar of night magic. It warms the blood and sets the heart aflutter, inflaming passions, inspiring intense and unexpected friendships and bitter feuds with equal facility.

## Significance : Ribbon of Embers

The Admiral of the Freeborn Storm navy, and any character whose fleet was supporting the Imperial navy this season, may decide that their character was exposed to the strange, warm winds and the cold embers emitted from the transformed Ribbon of Salt this season.

Any such character benefits from having an additional hero point (even if they would not normally have hero points) but they also experience a roleplaying effect: you feel all your emotions much more deeply, and experience a strong desire to act. Passivity and caution feel unnatural and wrong; being bold and confronting things head-on feels ultimately fulfilling.

Both the hero point and the roleplaying effect last until the end of the Summer solstice.

## A GRIM HARVEST

Shortly after the Spring Equinox, peculiar eldritch creatures from the realm of Night scuttle out from the shadowy woodlands of Alderly in the Mourn, and out of barrows in the chalk of Freemoor. Scaled and feathered, they bring with them several immense black cauldrons that foam and bubble with vitriolic fluids. Largely ignoring the ongoing war around them, the heralds surround these cauldrons with complex apparatus of iridescent glass and curiously shaped flasks. Then these interlopers prowl among the cold, dead fields where some of the fiercest fighting between Jotun and Empire took place.

Where they encounter an unburied corpse, they gather round and carefully harvest the corpse.

The Night heralds only harvest dead orcs, and the occasional Feni. They come with pitchforks, barbed chains and ichor-sodden bags, pulling

half-decomposed corpses and limbs to the bubbling cauldrons and dropping them into the miasmatic brew within. They gather up crow-picked bones, listening carefully to them as if in conversation. These heralds do not seem to be interested in just any dead bodies -they are quite selective - though the standards by which they choose which corpse to claim are unclear. Into the cauldrons go the carcasses, to be boiled away to nothing but vapours and fluids, distilled into something otherworldly.

The heralds do not touch a single Imperial corpse. They steer well clear of soldiers on both sides. A few are willing to talk, and claim that they are servants to the great eternal Murit and Soghter. They are seeking the fundamental essence of the experience of ending. The cauldrons and alembics are all part of this effort, rendering down the flesh and bones of the dead to catch those brief final moments when life transitions to death. They say that their work is entirely of the body - that it is nothing to do with "ephemera" (presumably they mean souls) - they only catch the echoes of memory still left in the meat. This, they say, is a key part of the creation of the Azoth - though what the Azoth is, they remain hesitant to discuss. Some express a brief disappointment that they are not allowed to take Imperial bodies - such a lack will inevitably shape how the Azoth develops.

Their peculiar, grisly work complete, the heralds steal away with their cauldrons as stealthily as they arrived, leaving only a scattering of circular patches where the black kettles rested where no grass will grow.

## IMPERIAL LORE

Two new rituals enter Imperial Lore: Hammers of the Brilliant Shore (held over from Winter), and the challengingly problematic curse Mountain Remembers Its Youth. Any character who is eligible to master a new ritual can master one of these rituals by the usual means, and they can be cast without being mastered using the normal rules for ritual casting.



# SHELTER FROM THE STORM

## OVERVIEW

The Isle of Zemress lies well outside Imperial waters, albeit still within the Bay of Catazaar. It is named for that fabled mariner known as The Blade of the Isles. Sutannir tell how her ship - The Kraken's Bane - was found floating abandoned a year after she set off on a dangerous mission. A century and a half later, the mystery of her disappearance was explained - according to stories she and her crew ended up marooned on an island on the Broken Shore, forced to make new lives for themselves in the very shadow of the Grendel nation.

A couple of years ago, the inhabitants of the island reached out to their Freeborn cousins. A century and a half of separation had seen the inhabitants of the Isle of Zemress diverge somewhat from the traditions of their distant cousins, however. For one thing, they appeared almost Marcher-like in their insistence on the virtue of honest toil and hard work. Even more unfortunately, they had embraced a heretical view that while the virtues of the Way certainly existed, only the virtue of Prosperity had any true value - indeed they seemed to have little understanding of the deeper truths of the Way, or the nature of the other Virtues.

In 380YE, Immeldar i Ezmara i Erigo and the Freeborn assembly recognised the inhabitants of the Isle of Zemress as having the right to see themselves as citizens of the Brass Coast, should they wish. With the aid of the General Assembly, they also resolved to send missionaries to help lead the islanders to understanding of all the Virtues. In the latter, they were apparently successful. While reserving a special place for Prosperity, over the last year the islanders have come to see the value of the other six Virtues and incorporate them into their lives..

Now, however, disaster has struck. The community on the Isle of Zemress has prospered for the last century and a half largely by avoiding the gaze of the Grendel. It is impossible to know for sure what has drawn their attention - perhaps the Imperial missionaries visiting the island, perhaps simply bad fortune - but notice it they have. Grendel pirate ships and slaving vessels are gathering to descend on the island. When they do so, they will loot the place of everything of value, and carry away in chains anyone who does not die fighting to protect their homes.

A single desperate message has been sent to Sol i Riqueza, one of the hosts for the egregore spirit of the Brass Coast, asking for help.

The orcs have found us. We were not quick enough, and some escaped. The Grendel now know where we are and their fleet masses. Even if we had the boats, we could not outrun them. We are desperate. Without your aid we cannot escape this trap. I beg you... do not let our story end in the salt mines of Dubhtraig.

Dhomiro Tevus i Zemress, Isle of Zemress

# Significance

The situation on the Isle of Zemress appears dire. Grendel privateers are attacking the island, with the clear intention of plundering its treasures and enslaving the population. There are several thousand islanders, who consider themselves Freeborn, and who have been welcomed by the people of the Brass Coast. They are reaching out to their Freeborn cousins - to the Empire - for aid.

# Evacuation

The Grendel have not by all accounts committed a full navy to the area - at the moment it appears that the attackers are disorganized pirates. Yet the damage those fleets are capable of cannot be underestimated. There is little chance that the islanders can hold out against the Grendel for long - they are not equipped to fight off a concerted Grendel attack, and the orcs are not likely to stop attacking until the humans are all enslaved and their settlements pillaged of all valuables.

A major naval battle would be extremely tricky - even if the Freeborn Storm could reach the territory where the Isle of Zemress lies, it would need to navigate treacherous waters - all assuming it could get past the Grendel navies engaged in Spiral. Realistically, the only viable plan to evacuate the Isle will need the support of the independent ship captains of the Empire - should they wish to make the attempt.

During downtime, any Imperial fleet owner may assign their fleet to the "Evacuate Zemress Island" opportunity (which will be appear as a "navy" you can support in the drop-down menu). The outcome of the opportunity depends on the total number of fleet ranks assigned to the opportunity.

# PARTICIPATION

Each standard fleet assigned adds 100 strength to the opportunity. Each additional rank the fleet possesses adds another 20 strength. Rituals and other effects that make a fleet more effective at supporting a navy apply their benefits normally to the effective ranks. Once downtime closes, we will determine the outcome based on the total effective strength of all assigned fleets.

- If less than 500 effective strength is assigned, the evacuation will be a failure. Any fleets sent to the area will be beaten back by the Grendel and virtually no Zemress islanders will be saved; the Grendel will destroy their community and carry all surviving members away as slaves.
- If the effective strength of the rescue effort is at least 500 but less than 1000 then the a few of the fleets assigned to the task will be able to bypass the Grendel privateers. A small number of Zemress islanders will be saved; around a hundred in total. The rest of the islanders will be captured and enslaved, and their valuables will be completely looted by the Grendel.
- If the effective strength is is at least 1000 but less than 2000 then the Imperial captains will be able to break through the Grendel blockade and rescue the majority of the islanders, along with a few of their most treasured possessions. All the islanders will be transported to safety in Feroz and Madruga, but they arrive with little more than the clothes on their backs.
- If the effective strength is at least 2000 but less than 3000 then the Imperial captains will be able to smash the Grendel blockade allowing them to rescue the majority of the islanders, and also giving the islanders sufficient time to bring many of their most valuable possessions. The islanders will be transported to safety in Feroz and Madruga, and arrive with goods and materials sufficient to help them start new lives without needing any further assistance. They will be able to bring with them several of their treasures - including some relics of Zemress herself.
- If the effective strength is 3000 or greater then the Imperial captains will be able to rout the Grendel assault, allowing them to rescue all of the islanders prepared to leave, along with all their possessions and belongings. The islanders will be transported to safety in Feroz and Madruga, with sufficient wealth to start new lives without needing further

assistance, adding to the general prosperity of the Brass Coast and eventually increasing the taxation revenue of the treasury. (OOC Note: An increase to the taxation revenue of these territories reflects the establishment of several new resources here, operated by exiles from the Isle of Zemress).

## REWARDS

The Zemress Islanders are followers of Prosperity, and they understand the importance of rewards for hard work. As many of the islanders as possible will offer payment to the Imperial captains who assign to this opportunity in the form of valuables and services. Each fleet assigned to the rescue will receive one crown from the grateful islanders for each 20 effective strength that they contribute to the rescue.

## A MATTER OF RELIGION

When they first made contact with the Empire, the Zemress islanders were convinced that only the virtue of Prosperity had value. In the years since, the good work of Immeldar i Ezmara i Erigo and the Freeborn priests have slowly softened this view. The islanders still consider Prosperity to be the pre-eminent virtue, but they have accepted that each of the other six has value. Before the Grendel attack they were slowly integrating Ambition Pride, Loyalty, and the rest into their system of belief. An opportunity exists for the Synod to recognise the success of the Freeborn missionaries, and urge the people of the Empire to aid these prodigal cousins.

The people of the Isle of Zemress are in need, and it is our duty to aid them. The (Freeborn Assembly/Imperial Synod)] empowers X with X doses of liao to urge those captains who command swift vessels in the Bay of Catazaar to make their way to Zemress Island with all urgency.

### Synod Mandate

The Freeborn national assembly may pass this judgement of mandate with a lesser majority. It requires a named Freeborn priest to be equipped with at least 25 doses of liao. If it passes, any Freeborn captain who engages in any action other than the "Evacuate Zemress Island" opportunity has their production or effective fighting strength reduced by one fifth. This will reduce their effectiveness when engaging in foreign trade, supporting a navy, privateering, or participating another special opportunity (such as Down along the cove).

The General Assembly may also pass this mandate. It requires a named priest (of any nation), and at least 50 liao. If they do so, then any Imperial captains who take an action other than Evacuate Zemress Island will suffer a one-fifth penalty to production or fighting strength.

As always, in the case of competing mandates (whether specific to this opportunity or otherwise) the one with the most liao assigned will take precedence.

## A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

The Quartermaster General of the Imperial Armies may choose to declare the evacuation of Zemress island to be a military matter. While there will be no significant damage to the Grendel ability to make war on the Empire, there will certainly be some fighting between Imperial ships and Grendel vessels. As such, the Quartermaster may choose to include "Evacuate Zemress Isle" when apportioning the Guerdon. If they do so, any fleet that assigns to the opportunity will also receive a share of the Imperial Guerdon as if they had supported an Imperial navy, in addition to the payment they receive from the grateful islanders.

# TOO MUCH OF NOTHING

## MOUTHS TO FEED

The Tower of Dawn has fallen. Drycastle lays in the hands of the traitorous Druj and the Imperial presence within the Barrens has been expelled by the green tide that swept away all before it. Many ancient families who have lived on these lands for centuries now find themselves homeless as they make the march towards the relative safety of the wooded glades of Semmerholm.

Amongst these families come a large mass of farm workers who once worked the renowned farms of House Renard. For untold time House Renard has committed themselves to the maintenance of Drycastle and the fortification it held. Their farms stocked the castle and the garrison there and have fed many a Dawnish army during the numerous crusades to take the Barrens for the glory of Dawn. Their wines have have toasted many a victory and have mourned many a defeat in those troubled lands and they alone have mastered the cultivation of the grape known as the Barrenberry which give their vintages its unique flavour.

Now all that remains of this great house is its earl, an elderly enchanter known as Hugo the Scarred, and yeofolk. Oh so many yeofolk. Farmers now without farms to work, and no harvest to feed them through the coming winter. Farmers with only the clothes on their back and their Pride.

But not all is lost for some things did survive the sack of Drycastle, carried away by hand so that the cursed Druj could not get their hands on them. In addition to their heirlooms one other thing came with the refugees, a single box of seed of the fabled Barrenberries. With the Vineyards in Drycastle now in orcish hands, whoever has access to this precious bounty will be sure to monopolise the market for this now rare resource.

With so many mouths to feed Earl Hugo comes to anvil with his seneschal to find buyers for these. He is expected to arrive at some point on Saturday afternoon.

## A MEMORIAL FOR A LOVED ONE

Morold Lionsgate has sent his seneschal to Anvil, with a page of writings that he found. The writings, although incomplete, seem to have been written by a Dawnish senator long since passed through the labyrinth. Whether they will fetch some coin from the Dawnish or maybe the fabled library of Anvil that he has heard so much about remains to be seen, but he knows that Sir Morold is not a rich man and it would be good to be able to put the money towards something for him.

He is likely to begin looking for a buyer in the Dawnish camp first. He will want to try the library and maybe to speak to other seneschals to see if they are interested, maybe someone from Weirwater is interested in the writings of an influential past senator. If not, it will have to be selling the cider round the taverns again.

## A MYSTERIOUS DEATH AND A SKEIN ON THE BRINK

Ilma Erkking, a young Suaq icewalker has been found drowned dead in her sleep. Her friend has been sent from his hall, to make his own way in life. He only has one thing to sell, and although is worried about its prominence is trying to make some money by selling it. He plans to travel to Anvil where he can sell the ancient skinning knife he has found, and to try to start to make amends for the death of his friend.

He knows that the death of Ilma may make the knife harder to sell, but if he is to restart his life, it is important that he is honest with people and they know what they are getting themselves into. He has not been frayed, no Stormcrow was present at the

Hall to declare him such, but he knows it wise to seek their council, maybe he could show people the cave he found, or maybe he could trade items to give a great gift to his hall.

Either way, he should start at Anvil, although this does mean speaking to his egregores, and he has heard rumours of Sulkavaris' nature.

## AN EXEMPLARS CURIOSITY

Saulo looked at his sister and shrugged. The story they had been told was a good one, and they had enjoyed the tale. "You say it was from the inspirational tomb of an exemplar of Prosperity?"

The merchant looked at them and nodded. "And the exemplar was freeborn?"

The merchant nodded again, but tight-lipped he said nothing. "So it was Zemress' tomb?"

The merchant kept staring, then slowly replied

"I never said whose tomb. It does not change the story" Felipa looked at Saulo and he back to her.

"Dinner and a bed for the night for the item?" It seemed like a good deal. It was a gamble, but surely they would be able to get profit on it. The merchant pushed the item wrapped in lace slowly and purposefully across the table. Felipa smiled and picked it up.

"I guess i will be doing the trading, you have a house guest to look after"

Saulo opened his mouth to argue, but he knew she was the better trader... and he the better cook.

Felipa i Manola i Guerra is planning on bringing this curio to Anvil to see if anyone would like to purchase it. It has not been investigated and she guarantees that no rituals nor spells have been cast on it. To investigate the item they would either have to have purchased it already or people would have to pay for the privilege.

All freeborn know that to get a good profit you need to work hard, so it is unlikely that Felipa will let the curio go to the first seller for an easy sale.

# WHEN THE SHIP COMES IN

Perhaps the most significant development in international affairs in the last few months has been the work by Bonewall Rek, and the missionaries. They have worked with to spread the Doctrine of the Howling Abyss and the Doctrine of the Ancestors to those followers of the Way who live on foreign shores. Imperial wayfarers have visited communities in Asavea, Jarm, Sarcophan, and the Commonwealth to spread the understanding of the orc soul among pilgrims in these distant lands.

It is important to realise that while foreign congregations that follow the Way look to the Empire for guidance and support, they are largely made up of local people and not migrant Imperials. The Synod has no legal power over them - in practice they are entirely independent. Just as the practice of the Way differs from Imperial nation to Imperial nation, so the way that foreign congregations practice the Way can differ from the traditions of the Empire. Yet any true follower of the Way acknowledges the same Doctrines and the same Virtues, wherever they may live.

For the most part, the change of Doctrine has been well received. Taking the time and the effort to ensure that people understand the reasons for the changes, and their implications, helps smooth over what might otherwise have been a divisive process. Still, all is not smooth sailing - the Sumaah have their own missionaries and while for the moment they have largely adopted a "wait and see" attitude, that could change drastically.

The missionaries encountered the least resistance in the Commonwealth - unsurprising given that the humans of that nation already accept the orcs as their equals. Indeed, the Commonwealth followers of the Way primarily seem relieved that the Empire has settled the question of orc souls - although there is apparently some heated disagreement as to the precise nature of the Howling Abyss and the ancestors. The fact that orc citizens of the Commonwealth are empowered to join in these debates makes them significantly more constructive than they might otherwise have been. In most cases there is more interest in pursuing the old arguments about the role auras play in the practice in the Way, and "theoretical" discussion of the Lucidian blasphemy.

Those followers of the Way who live in civilized Asavea likewise are open to the change of doctrine - many have never so much as seen an orc, and in the Asavean mind they are already seen as mystical and magical creatures. The new temple, and recent visits from missionaries encouraging tolerance and cooperation have helped a good deal. Unfortunately, this acceptance is not universal - it is extremely difficult for Imperial missionaries to make contact with any of the rebel slaves who claim to follow the Way; the Sumaah have much more sway in this regard.

In the Delves, there is some resistance, but for the most part the people of Sarcophan have more things to worry about than whether orcs have souls, and the nature of those souls. Orcs are not common in that part of the world, and for the most part the people of Sarcophan and the feral orc tribes give each other a wide berth. Accepting that orcs have their own place in creation is easy for people who rarely have anything to do with them.

The followers of the Way among the Jarmish are the least receptive to the new doctrines. Many are familiar with orcs as savage killers. There is also a somewhat stronger Sumaah presence here than might be expected, and their priests are urging the faithful to be cautious - especially in Eastern Jarm where they have recently constructed a prestigious temple of the Way at the invitation of Magician Prince Barbara Radz of Rigia. In the end though, many followers of the Way grudgingly see the wisdom of the new doctrines.

For now, there appears to be no chance of a schism. Minds are not changed over night, but many foreign congregations respond positively to the reasoned arguments of the Imperial missionaries.

## ASAVEAN ARCHIPELAGO

- Every Imperial Fleet trading with Nemoria receives an additional measure of Iridescent Gloaming

Relations with Asavea remain broadly positive. The Freeborn Assembly decision to embrace Asavean visitors has no doubt helped (and has certainly helped improve the prosperity of Freeborn parador owners in the vicinity). Work on the Temple of the Way in Nemoria continues apace. 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.

## A VENOMOUS JELLYFISH IN THE TIDEPOOL

There is, however, a problem. The Senate recently commissioned a set of docks in Sarvosan district of Caricomare, intended for the use of two Asavean plenum families, to facilitate trade in white granite. Construction of the Cavabianca Dock has been completed, and a ship bearing members of the the Heraclien and the Ragnabe families has arrived on the Bay of Catazaar to begin preparations for the first deliver of white granite. Unfortunately, their ship has docked in Oran, in Feroz, rather than in Sarvos. According to the Asaveans, the agreement made with the Ambassador to Asavea was that the docks would be built within sight of the temple, in Oran - not in Sarvos. It is believed a representative of the families is due to attend Anvil during this summit to speak to the Ambassador. Hopefully this matter can be sorted out painlessly, or the Cavabianca Dock may end up going unused.

## CITADELS OF AXOS

- Any character with a congregation can sell liao in downtime for 18 rings a dose (rather than the more usual 12)

Word from traders visiting the Towers of Kantor is that the Axou attitude towards the Empire remains broadly positive. Several of the more well-connected merchants speak particularly highly of Tarquinius of Ankarien (the current Imperial Ambassador to Axos).

The Axou continue to pay over the odds for liao. While there are still some voices concerned about what use it might be being put to, the price remains half again as high as it has been in recent years. The Imperial Synod could still use a statement of principle to encourage or discourage the trade of liao to Axos, and if the statement passed with a greater majority, it might influence the outcome of this opportunity. Likewise, the Imperial Senate may pass a Senate motion to amend the law regarding the trade of liao to the Axou - making it illegal - in which case they could remove this opportunity completely.

## PRINCIPALITIES OF JARM

- The northern port of Kavor will supply an additional ingot of green iron in the coming season.
- The southern port of Vezak will supply an additional crystal mana to each visiting ship.
- The eastern port of Rigia provides no additional materials.

Relations with Jarm remain positive. The completion of the Pallas docks in Cargo; the Lodge in Tassato; the trade of rituals between the Imperial Conclave and the House of Princes; all contribute to an atmosphere of polite cordiality. Imperial captains continue to receive warm welcomes and secure good deals with merchants in Kavor and Vezak. Sadly, the port of Rigia becomes a little less welcoming - the presence of the Sumaah temple there makes it a little less friendly, and while the Eastern Alliance has largely been recognised as a peer by the Princes of the North and South it is easy to see that the older, more established factions have little interest in making life easy for the "upstarts". The steady decline of Imperial fleets visiting Rigia - especially in comparison to the more prosperous ports in the north and south - cannot be helping their situation, either.

## SUMAAB REPUBLIC

- Sumaah remains at war with the Empire; the port of Zemeh remains closed.

The only significant development is that a Sumaah ship has recently arrived at the docks of Crown's Quay in Necropolis. A small delegation of Sumaah Präster disembarked, and began the overland journey to Anvil. It has been confirmed that this is Tipoa the Insightful, Präst of the Way, Utredare of the House of Wisdom, and their entourage. Last season the Sumaah House of the Way declared their intention to have an inquisition performed on Bonewall Rek and Bonewall Cole; to "evaluate the seemingly blasphemous and heretical doctrines they have propagated." They are expected to arrive at Anvil later Friday or early Saturday, but they have not chosen to share their itinerary with the Civil Service.

While Sumaah is at war with the Empire, the Empire has not at this time declared war on Sumaah and as such this delegation enjoys all the legal protections (and responsibilities) due any foreign visitors to Anvil.

## FARADEN

- There is no opportunity to trade with Faraden directly during downtime.

Relations with Faraden remain ... variable. Some Faraden (especially the merchant class and many of their wizards) appear broadly pro-Imperial. Traders are a relatively common sight in the Brass Coast, and in the Imperial heartlands of Tassato and Casinea. They are also slowly becoming more common in the eastern Marches, southern Varushka, and western Dawn - especially where stretches of the Blood Red Roads near completion.

By contrast, most the warrior class, and much of the priestly class, remain deeply suspicious of Imperial citizens and their motives. During the Spring Equinox, the high-ranking priestly investigator known as the Quiet Flame and her apprentice visited the Empire to investigate the deaths of the i Tsagaan sisters. By all accounts they secured testimony from a number of people, and discussed several matters relating to differences in law and Justice between the two nations.

On returning to Faraden, the Quiet Flame is said to have delivered her findings with a heavy heart. She apparently concurred that the death of Laodicia i Tsagaan at the hands of Ephrael of Highguard was almost certainly provoked by the sisters themselves. While there is no certain evidence that the other two sisters took their own lives, everyone involved appeared sincere in their belief it was the case. The people of the Empire certainly appear to believe that the three were involved in some plot to destabilise relations between the Faraden and the Empire. There is no contradiction in accounts of the death of Laodicia - and as the Quiet Flame herself is reported to have said "If someone were to credibly threaten my own family, I would not require a spiritual aura to give me the will to kill them and all who stood with them."

However, the Quiet Flame also reported - supported by others who have recently visited the Empire including the priests Canto and Boma Ogudai who attended the very Symposium where the i Tsagaan sisters met their fate - that the Empire still understands nothing of Justice. Despite the efforts of the Faraden priesthood, they remain stubbornly disinterested in any truths save their own - worse there are signs that many of them barely seem to understand their own code of laws. The Empire certainly seems to consider any attempt to share the knowledge of Justice to be in itself a heinous - even capital - crime. This rankles with the Faraden priesthood particularly.

Barring any damning evidence coming to light at this late stage, the Faraden seem to view the matter of the i Tsagaan sisters to have been laid to rest - albeit uneasily. The situation has deescalated, but relations remain turbulent. It is possible that the Faraden ambassador Tal'Shar i Zabala i Erigo may have additional information on this situation once they receive their briefing at the coming summit.



## SARCOPHAN DELVES

- Any Imperial fleet captain who trades with the Delves this downtime will receive 2 doses of Cerulean Mazzarine, but receive one less of each of Bladeroot and Marrowort

Relations with the Sarcophan Delves remain pleasant, if a little distant. The southern merchants and traders are a common sight along the Bay of Catazaar, and many are making adventurous visits inland. Rumours of an agreement with the Grendel to ensure their ships retain free access to the Imperial ports are rife, and the merchants cheerfully acknowledge the presence of an orc embassy in the Delves. There are even a few rumours of Sarcophan captains trading with both the Broken Shore and the Empire. Indeed, some concern is raised that the Sarcophan merchants are cheerfully buying Imperial goods and then selling them at a profit in Dubhtraig! There's no proof - but there are enough mutterings and whisperings to raise concern.

Regardless of their activities in the Empire, news has filtered through visiting captains that the Delves are experiencing a surprise surplus this season. The kruidenkenner of the Delves are adept at the cultivation of the magical herbs, along with any number of recreational and medicinal herbs of a more mundane nature. In recent months however, the Delves have seen a bumper crop of Cerulean Mazzarine, and prices have dropped significantly in the Delves. This season, any ship visiting Sarcophan for purposes of trade will receive 2 doses of Cerulean Mazzarine, but 1 dose each fewer of Imperial Roseweald and Marrowort. This situation is not expected to last beyond the Autumn Equinox, so merchants interested in taking advantage of the surplus will need to move swiftly.

## THE COMMONWEALTH

- Trade with Leerdam and Volkavaar remains stable.

Relations with the Commonwealth seem to be stable, albeit frosty. The strategists and generals of the south-east continue to prepare for what many now see as an inevitable outbreak of hostilities between the Commonwealth and the Principalities of Jarm. At the same time, it has not escaped their notice that the Empire appears extremely friendly with the Magician-Princes while keeping the Commonwealth at arm's length. The current situation is best described as tense.

During the Spring Equinox, the Urizen Assembly made efforts to encourage Commonwealth soldiers to join the campaign against the Grendel. The Commonwealth's opposition to slavery is well known - but Commonwealth critics accuse the Empire of continuing to send mixed messages. In the last six months alone, the Empire has constructed the Pallas Docks to explicitly trade weirwood with Jarm, and the Cavabianca Dock to trade white granite with the Asaveans. In the eyes of many in the Commonwealth, the Empire is happy to denounce slavery when it suits them, and condemn the orcs for taking their own citizens as slaves... but more than happy to profit from this corrupt institution when the opportunity arises. Thus, while they roundly condemn the Grendel for taking slaves, there seems to be little interest in getting involved on behalf of the Empire in their dispute with the orcs of the Broken Shore. It is possible the new Ambassador to the Commonwealth may learn more when they receive their briefing during the Summer Solstice (the title is currently vacant, but likely to be appointed during the first Senate session on Friday night).

# THE ORCS

- There is no opportunity for Imperial fleets to trade with the Thule, the Druj, or the Barrens Orcs during downtime.

The Empire is technically at peace with three of the nearby orc tribes - although it is not clear how much longer the Imperial Senate will remain at peace with the Druj given recent developments in Dawnguard.

## Thule

The northern orcs have declined to recognise the recently appointed Ambassador to the Thule, Juha the Cavespider. Their emissary in Void, Rak Who-Speaks-For-The-Dragons-United has suggested that while the Thule will continue to deal with the "respected Varushkan warlock", they are not

prepared to recognise his title until such time as the Empire either builds an appropriate embassy somewhere in northern Varushka, or amends the title such that it is appointed by the Varushkans and not by the Imperial Senate.

The Dragons have not, at this time, withdrawn their offer to participate in the northern trade network, nor their interest in acquiring the remnants of the Runeforge beneath Gildenheim, but their mild dissatisfaction over the matter of the Ambassador is obvious.

## The Great Forest Orcs

The orcs of the Great Forest, and their human allies, are still in Therunin. The situation is not substantially changed from where it was last season, save that the orcs and the Empire are now actively involved in discussion of a treaty. For the time being, they show no signs of moving, but that could change at any moment.

# CHANGING OF THE GUARDS

## Overview

The Spring Equinox saw many dramatic events unfold in Dawn. There was a tourney to elect the monarch of Dawn, but for the first time in centuries it was contested by two candidates, with nobles rallying round Imperatrix Lisabetta or Yael, the First Empress Reborn. In the end the only significant opposition to Lisabetta was from House Ossienne and their supporters who opposed both candidates. The contest was decisively won by Empress Lisabetta, the Imperial Throne is once more the Monarch of Dawn.

But the tourney has only begun to reveal the depths of the Dawnish affection for their new Queen. At the same summit an extraordinary Statement of Principle was put to the Dawnish National Assembly by Tamain Sepulchre where it passed with a greater majority. News of the statement has rippled across Dawn, carried by wandering troubadours to every noble house. The extraordinary words have inspired many arguments and much fervour - did Tamain really mean what she appeared to say. Now there is a chance to take stock of what that might entail.

## Significance

The Dawnish National Assembly recognises the Empress Lisabetta as Queen of Dawn. She is the ultimate authority in this life and her words should be followed above all others.

Tamain Sepulchre, Dawn National Assembly, Spring Equinox 381YE, Upheld 158 - 20

Tamain's words - just as the new Queen is crowned have reminded many of Dawn of their glorious history, of what they once had. Inevitably, it caused a few to ask if they might not have such a thing again?

## CROWNS

Centuries ago, before Dawn joined the Empire, the Monarch of Dawn was elected much as they are today - by glorious tourney of nobles. But in those times the Monarch was far from a ceremonial position - they commanded the loyalty of their earls and through them they ruled over the land. They were the ultimate authority... their words were followed above all others... That changed when Dawn joined the Empire - but could it be changed back?

On the face of it, it seems absurd. The Imperial legal system does not leave any room for a monarch to actually rule in Dawn. But this is Dawn! - pointing out that the entire thing was completely impossible simply created a challenge. On this occasion the challenge was eagerly taken up by an ambitious young advocate, Melusine of Tanner's Bar in Causse. She has spent weeks criss-crossing Dawn, since the last summit, talking to nobles about her plan... her extraordinary, incredible, glorious idea to make Lisabetta Queen in more than just name...

Melusine's plan rests on one simple idea. While Imperial law does not allow for a monarchy, it does allow for each nation to choose their senators according to their own culture. In Dawn, this "election" has been conducted by a tourney between the noble houses for hundreds of years - but that tradition only built on the existing tradition to elect the Monarch.

Her proposal requires only a subtle change to the existing arrangements. The tourney should be held just as it always has done - but now it will be conducted beneath the eyes of the Queen. The nobles will do battle for her approval - and when the fight is won the Queen will pick the contestant that fought most gloriously. That noble's house will then put forward one of their own to be senator.

A number of people have pointed out that the Empress is likely to be too busy to attend every tourney, but Melusine argues passionately that she shouldn't be expected to. She points out that the same contestants often win the tourney for a territory each year. If nobody is expecting an upset, then the Empress can simply send a representative who can judge the contest in her name. Maybe she will only take an interest if the outcome is in doubt... or if she wishes the outcome to be in doubt...

Melusine has discussed her plan at length with magistrates and civil service. They have confirmed that while this election method would be unorthodox, it is compatible with Imperial Law - provided that it reflected the will of the Dawnish people. The definitive test of the will of a nation is to ask their egregore.

Speaking as the egregore, Lady Griffinsbain has confirmed that many in the nation would welcome a step towards a full restoration of Dawn's monarchy, but such views are far from universal. It is one thing to cheer for the new Queen in a tourney, it is quite another to hand her control of Dawn's political authority. Melusine is passionate, but she can hardly convince all of Dawn by herself. Nor would coming to Anvil and convincing everyone there work either - she needs to influence the entire nation and that is only possible with a mandate. Thus she is travelling to Anvil to seek out Tamain to ask her to submit the following mandate.

To achieve glory that rivals the Monarchs of old, our Queen must rule as they once did. We send X with 100 doses of liao to persuade all that she must become the ultimate authority in Dawn, so that we may all grow more glorious together.

### Synod Mandate

If this mandate were enacted it would do more than just change Dawn's elections. The Empress already possesses the power to speak to every citizen in the Empire once a season. With the backing of this mandate, those words would become as significant in Dawn as a Statement of Principle passed by the greater majority of their national assembly. They would be as likely as a Statement to create the opportunity in Dawn for a mandate in the following season.

Melusine's proposal already has some powerful backing. The Staff of the Archmage is a powerful magical item that forms part of the regalia of office of the Archmage. A new staff is crafted every year by a secretive weaver's cabal in Weirwater. This cabal, the Five Rings, holds the six schema required to make the staves as part of their most prized possessions. They have always refused all requests to share the schema with the Empire - according to their history the schema were given into their care by King Rodric the last independent King of Dawn. They have held them in trust ever since - but they have told Melusine that if Empress Lisabetta becomes Queen of Dawn in truth as well as just in title - then they will hand them over to the Queen for her to use in service of the nation and the Empire. What she chose to do with the schema could potentially mean the Archmages losing access to one of the symbols of their office - albeit so that any magician could wield one of these powerful ritual staffs.

The residents of Castle Spiral have also indicated that if the Queen's words really were the ultimate authority in Dawn, then they would kneel and acknowledge her as their true liege. If the Queen so commanded, then control of the castle's resources would then be passed to the Castellan of Spiral Castle, who could either continue to use the facilities of the Castle to help Imperial armies resupply - or dispose of the supplies of weirwood directly if they preferred.

## OLD WAYS

Melusine is not the only Dawnish citizen to respond to these dramatic events by considering some of the older traditions of Dawn. Glory lies at the heart of Dawn, it infects the lives of both noble and yeoman. It has been in the spirit of the nation since before the Empire was founded. But although glory still retains its central importance across Dawn, spiritually it has been

somewhat supplanted by the Way of Virtue. Now there is a small but growing group who seek to restore glory to its central role. Like Melusine, they have indicated that they are seeking to gain support so that they can raise a mandate to pursue their goals.

The National Assembly believes that the pursuit of Glory should come before the pursuit of Virtue. We send X with 25 doses of liao to encourage the citizens of Dawn to pursue glory above all other concerns.

### Synod Mandate

Every good Dawnish man or woman is already driven to pursue glory, but this exhortation to place it above the pursuit of virtue is new. It is potentially heretical - any who pursue this path risk condemnation at the hands of the Imperial Synod - and the person who raised the judgement might then face prosecution for abetting the act.

But this level of risk is what makes the exhortation challenging and inspiring. If the mandate were enacted, Dawnish folk would be inclined to take any time they have previously spent considering the virtues and devote it instead to the pursuit of glory. This would have two immediate effects - all Dawnish military units would receive a small boost, equal to an extra rank, as people rush to support them. But all Dawnish congregations would suffer an equivalent penalty, as people abandon the Way of Virtue to pursue glory.

Earl du Chailly, one of the people at the heart of this movement, is expected to arrive in Anvil on Friday evening of the Spring Equinox, to discuss the matter with the National Assembly of Dawn.

# ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

## Overview

For thirty years much of the Mournwold has languished under Jotun control. A handful of villages held out along with Overton in Greensward, but for many the Empire became a distant memory. As the seasons turned a generation were born knowing nothing but Jotun dominion. Now at last a great host of Imperial armies has entered the Mourn. But the Empire's magic designed to bleed the Jotun has claimed many innocent lives. With the destruction wrought by their magic it seems certain that the Empire will defeat the Jotun - what is less certain is how they will claim victory.

Imperial generals have been meticulous in issuing orders to their troops instructing them to avoid any civilian casualties, but while their concern is worthy the instructions are unnecessary. Imperial armies are made up of professional soldiers, drilled and disciplined; not some ravaging fire destroying everything in their path. Imperial officers strive to ensure the minimum civilian casualties from their actions unless they are specifically ordered to by their generals. Ironically the Jotun fight in a very similar style. The deaths of countless Mournwold civilians have not happened as the result of soldiers run amok at any point - they happened when the Imperial magicians explicitly summoned magic to bring death to everyone in the territory. The legacy of this act lingers in the grim demeanour of every yeoman the Imperial armies encounter.

Now that act has been complemented by the actions of the Iron Helms as they pursue their merciless onslaught against the Jotun, using any tactics necessary to break their enemies' spirit. This strategy is succeeding - the Jotun are falling back in terror. General Akstis Eigulys of the Iron Helms has given clear orders that his troops are only to slaughter the Jotun warriors in this way - no civilians are assaulted, they are allowed to pass unhindered. No Mournwold or orc civilian (of which there are many) have been harmed - but for the actions of the Iron Helms to work they have to be visible to everyone. Perhaps if this order had not come a season after the Empire used magic to kill a sixth of the population of the Mournwold things might have been different. But with that recent deed still fresh in their memory, many Mournwolders are watching the cruelty of the Iron Helms and thinking about what that means for them should the General issue fresh orders next season.

## Significance

The situation in the Mournwold is dire. Imperial soldiers are now openly shunned, or driven away with rough music. This is not what most Marchers had in mind when they set out to free the Mourn. The Jotun are clearly on the back foot, but the mood of the Mourn grows darker with every passing season. The Empire has just put out one fire in the north, it will need to find a way back from this abyss if it is to avoid starting many more.

At present the situation is so complicated that the civil service are unable to identify a single clear action that the Empire could take to redress the situation. Instead they have identified a number of different approaches the Empire might consider, all of which would have some effect if they could be done - but not enough by themselves. But if the Empire pursued most of the options identified at this stage, it would at least be enough to get prominent Mournwolders to talk to them about the problem.

What categorically will not work at this stage is words. The Way teaches that there is no virtue in words - only in actions. There is nothing people can say to the people of the Mournwold at this time that is going to change this situation - but the right actions might be sufficient to start addressing the problem.

## SPRING

Several landskeepers from the neighbouring territories have come over the border to try and talk to the Mournwolders - to try to convince them that the incident with the winter and spring curses at the start of the year were an aberration and that those responsible have been punished. Copies of Empress Lisabetta's address to the Empire were distributed.

Eventually they begin to put together a plan. Rivers of Life is a potent Spring ritual that could be used to help the Mourn. It's not going to bring back any of the dead of course, but it protects against Rivers Run Red, it would give succour to people in the territory and to make them feel safer. Of course a few of the landskeepers realize such a decision might not suit the wishes of the Military Council, but the Empress has been emphatic about reducing casualties - this would be something the Empire could actually do to reduce the amount of killing in the Mournwold.

The Mournwolders have almost nothing - there are few magicians of any worth and little mana to perform the ritual. But they figure if they can convince the Conclave with some kind of declaration or something - then maybe they can get the Conclave to cast the ritual for them. It wouldn't solve the problem - but it would be a start. Half a plan!

And then word comes down that the Empire has lost the ability to perform powerful Spring rituals... which has largely stymied the plan. It is clear is that substantive actions taken to reduce the number of casualties on all sides would influence how those who live here view what is happening. But how that might be achieved is no longer clear.

## LORE

The Marcher National Assembly have taken actions to ensure that the people of the Mournwold are aware that as a result of thousands of Marcher citizens being killed with magical curses, the Urizen General has been rebuked and the Warmage has lost their seat. The statement is largely falling deaf ears at the moment - but from all the dark talk about a wicker man, it is clear that little short of summary execution or voluntary immolation would mollify their anger. Still, a few people are able to at least make the case that the Empire has demonstrated a change of heart.

Unfortunately these advocates for the Empire are forced to eat their own words when news arrives that the Imperial Conclave has added another potent Spring curse to Imperial lore. It is hard to make a case that anyone regrets the use of Spring curses on the Mournwold when the Empire is busily adding yet more rituals of this kind to lore. And the timing is particularly unhelpful. In other nations magicians are studying the ritual and wondering how they might use it on their enemies... but the response of the few Mournwolders who can do magic is to study the ritual to see how they might best protect themselves against it.

People have queried if a ritual might be removed from Imperial lore before now. In theory there is no legal mechanism by which such a thing might be accomplish, but Harry Archer, an enterprising thresher from Mitwold has come up with an option. The Imperial Conclave can interdict a ritual text - and they can give instruction for the thing they interdict to be destroyed. This declaration is usually applied to an item - or a small class of items - but Harry points out that in theory the Conclave might choose to interdict every single known copy of a ritual text - giving orders for them to be destroyed. If that were done - then the effect would be identical to if the ritual had never been added to lore.

The thresher has spoken to the civil service and they have confirmed that while there is no fundamental constitutional bar to this approach, it is not consistent with the current law. While interdicted magic items or materials should be handed in promptly to the civil service this explicitly does not apply to interdicted rituals, which are simply illegal to perform. Magistrates advise that a change to the law would be required to create a new Conclave power to accomplish this. They argue that it would be appropriate to create a new power and they warn it would be expensive - they calculate it would cost 25 thrones per named ritual to seek out and destroy every copy of each of those ritual texts in the Empire. It has been impishly suggested that this power could be called a Declaration of Remorse.

It would be incredibly expensive to remove Rivers Run Red from Imperial Lore but it would be a clear step to demonstrate to the folk of the Mourn that the Empire regretted the decision to use that ritual. It would need to be done alongside removing Mountain Remembers its Youth though - leaving one or the other rituals in Imperial lore would achieve nothing. If these rituals are removed it would not prevent anyone who has mastered the ritual from continuing to cast it but it will no longer be available to learn without a ritual text.

## MITHRIL

Many Mournwolders feel betrayed by the Imperial Synod. After a year of criticizing the people of Whittle for their hatred of the Jotun, culminating in the execution of one of their spiritual leaders, the Empire appears to have demonstrated that they despise the Jotun every bit as much as the Whittle folk. The accusation on many lips is that the Empire is not really here to give the Mourn back to the Mournwolders - they are just here to kill as many Jotun as possible.

At this stage, the Marcher assembly and the rest of the Imperial Synod is going to find it impossible to move the hearts and minds of the people of the Mournwold. Indeed, given the way liao works to amplify situations, creating auras across the Mourn is likely to make the situation worse. Giving an angry population Courage, or making them Ambitious, or Proud... could end very badly. The Hierro clan demonstrated the risks in encouraging people to pursue virtue.

What would help is some concrete gesture that demonstrated that this war was being fought for the benefit of the Marcher people who live in the Mournwold. Something the Empire could do that would show these people that this was about freeing them - not killing Jotun. One way the Empire could do that is to allocate the Singing Caves, the mithril Bourse resource located on the Greensward near Overton, as a national seat rather than an Imperial one. Having one of their own in charge of the mine, rather than have some over-dressed League Prince (everyone seems to agree that the League will own it) would blunt the accusation that this war was only ever about killing the Jotun.

The Senate recently voted to allocate the seat to the Marchers - but the decision was vetoed by the Throne. If the mine is brought back under Imperial control that decision will need to be made again. The Empress has been crystal clear that the Prosperity of the Empire depends on resources like the Singing Caves being Imperial. It remains to be seen if she prefers to go down in history as a prudent ruler in the tradition of Empress Mariika or a benevolent leader like Emperor Frederick.

## LAND

Land matters above all else to Marchers. They defend what they have to the death - and they expect other Marchers to do the same. The Marcher generals understood that; General Will Talbot of the Drakes understood that. If Imperial strategy in the Mourn had been spearheaded by Marcher generals leading Marcher armies things might have been different. But the folk of the Mournwold watched in disgust over winter as countless Imperial armies gave ground before the Jotun advance. And to prove their point that no true Marcher would have done that... when everyone else was falling back... the Drakes were given orders to hold their ground, to fight for every inch of land. In the view of many here that's not just how Marchers should fight - that's how everyone should fight.

Of course those who study strategy can well understand the value of giving ground. Falling back at the right time can be essential to save an army or to win a campaign in the long run. But the people of the Mournwold don't see it like that - and extolling the virtue of the strategic value of a well-organized retreat just annoys them all the more. If you're not fighting for your land... what in Virtue's name are you fighting for?



Recent actions have led many in the Mourn to question what the Empire is fighting for. So Friar Agnes has proposed a way that the Marchers might show some solidarity with the people of the Mourn and by doing so they can show the Empire what they are fighting for. Having heard that General Talbot was interested in ways to win hearts and minds she has sent a message to his office with a proposal for a mandate that the Marcher National Assembly could pass.

Land matters above all else. Marcher armies should always stand their ground to defend what is theirs. We send X with 25 doses of liao to spread the word that no Marcher army should ever give ground.

### Synod Mandate

The Marchers are naturally inclined to such a mindset, so it would not take much to convince them of the wisdom of this approach - and once it was agreed there would be no going back. If this mandate were enacted, it would become impossible for any Marcher general to issue the order to give ground to their army.

Such an action would not solve all the problems in the Mourn. It wouldn't do anything for the Empire's standing here - but it would improve the standing of the Marcher nation in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Mourn. It would demonstrate that the people of Upwold, Mitwold, and Bregasland shared their passion to defend their lands. It would help them view other Marchers as just like them, rather than lumping them in with the rest of the Empire which is what is happening at the moment.

Of course there is a way that the Empire could demonstrate that they shared the concerns of the Mournwold people. The General Assembly could pass a version of the mandate for all Imperial armies. That would require ten times the amount of liao - this change of strategy would be a hard sell in many lands. But giving up the ability for any Imperial army to give ground would prove to the people of the Mournwold that the Empire is here fighting for their land.

## NEIGHBOURS

The Jotun forced those who served them to toil hard regardless of their race. For three decades, those Marchers who were forced to become thralls have worked alongside the orc thralls that the invaders brought with them. They are not friends, by any stretch, what they are, however, is neighbours. In some places that bond has grown surprisingly strong. Some of these people have more in common, more shared experience of hard work in fields and mines, than they do with the people across the border in Tassato, or Kahraman.

Some of these thralls have fled the Mourn, but most have been trapped, desperately trying to avoid the clashes between the armies. Now that the Empire is on the advance, the Marcher inhabitants are able to return to their farms and look after themselves - but the orc thralls have no lands to go back to and with Imperial armies on the rampage things are becoming increasingly dangerous for them. Their supplies are running low - and winter is coming.

Of all the problems in the Mourn, this is the only one that can be solved by throwing money at it. But it would take a lot of money... it would need 75 thrones a season to provide enough food to feed the orc thralls until a permanent solution can be found. Doing so would not remove the current antagonism in the Mourn, but it would demonstrate that the Empire was absolutely serious about ensuring that the Jotun thralls were not to be harmed by the war. And that would help improve the standing of the Empire with those Marchers who have worked side by side with the thralls for so long.

# IRON

The situation in the Mournwold is dire - nobody can deny that the territory is dry field awaiting a flame. While there are fifty thousand Imperial troops driving the Jotun before them, nobody is going to take up arms. There will be plenty of shouting and bawling and whining about the price, but people will put up and shut up. But once those armies are sent elsewhere, it is anybody's guess what will happen. Thus many folk are focussed on what can be done to resolve the problem. Some way to sooth angry tempers, to calm frayed nerves, some magic spell to make everyone be happy again. Only a few have had the Courage to point out that there is more than one way to skin a cat.

It's nothing to do with "cruelty" - it's to do with laying down the law. Everyone wants to believe that this war is about freeing the Mournwold, but there is another way to look at it. The Jotun control this land - now the Empire is coming with sword and shield to conquer it. They have done it before - how do people think Holberg ended up part of the Empire? They might have chosen to "join" the League, but they weren't interested in joining anything until the Dawnish armies conquered every piece of land they could see from their mountaintop. Once the writing on the wall was plain for them to see - they found loyalty and joined up.

It's not going to be pleasant - a lot of Marchers are pretty pig-headed. You put a spear to their belly and tell them to decide whether they're for the Empire or the Jotun and some of them are going to be dumb enough to choose a quick trip back to the Labyrinth. But the grim truth is that if the Empire comes in and forces these people to decide where their loyalty lies then plenty of them are going to see which way the wind is blowing. And the ones that don't... the ones that end up dead? Those are the ones that were going to be trouble anyway... The bitter truth that nobody will want to accept is that you can either have this trouble now... when you have fifty thousand Imperial boots on the ground... or you can have it in two years time when the territory is empty, the Jotun are massing and the armies are engaged elsewhere.

Sure, laying down the law will leave a bitter taste that may never wash out. These people are going to be hostile and angry for years to come. But they will do what they are told, they will get their freedom whether they want it or not, the Jotun will be driven out - and the Empire will have the Mourn back. They will have to build some fortifications to make sure nobody rebels... but that's it. If the Empire wants these people to love them... then they're going to have wipe their tears for them. But they don't have to do that. The people in the Mourn are already angry, the Empire might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb as the Marchers say. If the Empire is prepared to settle for obedience then there is a much more effective way to get the job done...

To accomplish this the Imperial Senate could pass legislation authorizing Imperial armies to lay down the law in the Mournwold. An example of a suitable wording to accomplish this might be:

Armies in the Mournwold are sanctioned to take any measures necessary this season to ensure that all resistance in this territory is crushed. All those who choose to violently resist should expect no quarter, neither will they be given redress under the law.

The current opinion of the constitutional court is that a motion drafted in such terms would have constitutional implications and require ratification by the Throne.

If this law is passed by the senate any Imperial general whose army is in the Mournwold this season may choose to issue the order to Lay Down the Law.

## LAY DOWN THE LAW

- All casualties inflicted by this army are increased by a tenth.
- The ability of this army to conquer territory is decreased by a tenth.
- The army will ruthlessly suppress any dissent in the conquered territory.

- As the army pushes the enemy back, they will root out any who are not loyal to the Empire. They will ruthlessly suppress dissent, executing any who will not acknowledge that they have been defeated. The conquered people will be hostile for years - the memory of this experience will not soon fade - but fear of the consequences will prevent any act of open rebellion within the next ten years.

If five or more Imperial armies follow this order, then any simmering rebellion in the Mourn will be ended before it can begin. If less than five armies submit this order, then only the regions that those specific armies capture will be conquered and forced to yield. If any Imperial general issues one of these orders then all other options presented here will fail.

# UNDER THE RED SKY

## Overview

The eternal are prominent supernatural beings who inhabit magical realms beyond the reach of the mortal world and whose abilities rival that of the more powerful ritual teams in the Empire as a result of their magical abilities and dominion over their realms. Dealings with them can bring many benefits - but it can also carry some risk... For those who are prepared to deal with them - the first challenge is to make contact - for all eternal are bound by magic to their realm and can never leave it.

The simplest way to make contact is to ask a herald to convey your message to their master - but that is only useful if you can find the right herald. An easier route is to ask a herald to take a message to an eternal they do not serve - but many will refuse to serve as a courier for another power and some will be angered by such a request.

Magicians offer other means - there are codified rituals that some Imperial magicians have created that allow them to communicate with a named eternal. Rituals like Missive for Sadogua are part of Imperial lore , where as others are only taught to the most trusted of mages. Few of these rituals guarantee a reply however.

The most certain route is to request the aid of the six Archmagi who represent the Empire to the eternal, and the eternal to the Empire. Each possesses the power of plenipotentiary - the power to send a formal message to one of the eternal of their realm each summit. Such a message is guaranteed to reach the eternal - and almost guaranteed to bring a reply. No eternal who wishes to maintain relations with the Empire will fail to respond to the missive - even if those relations are currently strained.

The nature of the plenipotentiary missive is such that it serves as a powerful invitation making it easier for the eternal to respond. An eternal who is sent a missive by an archmage of the Imperial Conclave is able to enter the Hall of Worlds at the next summit regardless of any state of enmity that may exist. It is not unknown for an eternal to take the opportunity to appear with their entourage in the Hall of Worlds in parley, though most choose a more low-key response. A peaceful response is not the only option however though it is exceptionally rare for an eternal to respond with force.

## Significance

During the Spring Equinox, five of the Imperial Archmagi used their power of plenipotentiary to contact eternal. Eternal do not always respond publicly to plenipotentiary messages, but in this case each of the five has chosen to make an open, formal response.

Magicians of the Empire who are politically active have many ways of being appraised of these messages. In cases where the eternal requests a formal parley the civil service plays a role in publicizing and arranging the meeting. In other cases, creatures of the realm about their business in the mortal world will mention the upcoming meeting - or may deliver formal messages to powerful or influential magicians directly.

## LLOFIR

- Rosamund Holt, Archmage of Spring, has contacted The Quiet One, Llofir.

Two months before the Summer Solstice, two heralds of Llofir - small rotting creatures with mushrooms growing out of their flesh - appear in the Hall of Worlds. Eventually a civil servant appears and they are able to pass on their message, that Llofir declines to appear for formal parley with the Spring Archmage, however, they have agreed to send messenger heralds to the Hall of Worlds to speak to the Archmage around one hour after midday on the Saturday.

## BARIEN

- Solomon of the Shattered Tower, Archmage of Summer, has contacted the Iron Duke, Barien to speak about the arrangement of a large tournament to see which eternal shall have the patronage of the Icy Crag of the Eternal Sun.

Castellan has agreed that she will meet personally with Solomon on the Saturday of the Summer Solstice, to discuss the matter over drinks and a light lunch. Barien has sent word that the challenge has been accepted by the Nobles of the Summer Realm but they refuse to partake of such a challenge before the Autumn Equinox - as they must have time to allow each of them to chose their champions and prepare fully for this conflict.

Barien has confirmed that the following eternal will be sending heralds to find champions. Eleonaris, Queen of the Fields of Glory. Jaheris, Prince of the Shadowed Forest, Cathan Canae, Queen of Ice and Darkness, Meraud, the Golden Magician, Rhianos, Regent of the Eternal sea and Adamant, King of the Golden Deeps. Barien himself is remaining neutral in this matter and there has been no response from Hayaak or others in the realm.

The icy winds that were damaging the Varushkan vale of Volchitrava have stopped and there seems to be no sign of Cathan Canae's anger at this moment.

This is not a formal request for parley - it is advance warning that the eternal of Summer intends to send representatives to speak to the people of the Empire and to chose or test champions. Castellan will have more details although it is clear that the Summer Realm plan to be proactive over the season in finding and supporting champions.

## THARIM

- Syrus Skybreaker, Archmage of Winter, has sent a second plenipotentiary message to Tharim, the Bound King of the Thrice-cursed Court.

Unlike the previous muted response, Shakle, a herald of Tharim has come to speak to the civil service personally. The herald has conformed that a full formal parlay with The Three will take place at midnight on the Friday night of the summit.

Tharim, the Bound King has agreed to speak about other things but especially involving the forging of chains to take on part of his curse. Skathe, The Hag Queen has sent a cryptic message that she is interested in speaking about fashion as part of this parley. Surut, the Charred Prince has requested a representative of the Imperatrix Lisabetta who he would like to speak to in a formal capacity. Whatever their real purpose it is clear is that this time the Court wish to address as many of the Empire as will listen.

Any magician of the Empire may attend, but it is at the discretion of the Winter Archmage who may speak during a formal parley.

## ROSHANWE

- Gancius Dellamotte di Sarvos, Archmage of Day has contacted the Navigator, Roshanwe and invited her to meet with the Empire.

One month before the Solstice, three thin-lipped humanoids with fish like features enter the Hall of the Worlds to speak to the civil service. Two of them wear long white robes and have their faces cowled, the third wears chainmail and plate under a long white tabard and bares a two handed sword strapped to their back. They bring a simple message, "The Mariner will be arriving to speak to the Mages of the Empire at five o'clock of the Saturday of the Summer Solstice to discuss matters arising from the recently held Symposium."

The Mariner is a common epithet for Roshanwe, so it may be that the eternal intends to appear in person - but identity can be fluid in the realms so it may indicate that some major herald will come forth to discuss matters instead. Whatever happens it seems clear that while this may not be a formal parley, Roshanwe is taking the Archmage's invitation very seriously.

## LASHONAR

Elyssiathain of Endsmeet, Archmage of Night, has sent a message to the Guardian of the Southern Skies, Lashonar.

One month before the Summer Solstice, flocks of brightly coloured parrots are seen across the Empire, landing nearby large groups and proclaiming in song that the Conscience of Kings will be happy to face the challenge of music and song proposed for the Winter Solstice.

In a more subdued meeting, two almost-human looking heralds in traditional brass coast grab approach the civil service in Anvil. They bring two things from Lashonar. The first is a message that he will arrive in the hall of worlds at around 3 o'clock on the Saturday of the Summer Solstice. The second is a small note, written to Murit that is being returned apparently unopened and unread.

It is clear that Lashonar is taking this challenge very seriously and is sending heralds to the hall of worlds to discuss terms.

## TIMETABLE

00:00 Thrice Cursed Court (Parley)

13:00 Llofir (Heralds)

15:00 Lashonar (Heralds)

17:00 Roshanwe (Meeting)