

Authority and acceptance

The old orc catches sight of himself in the windowglass, and wryly notes how much comfortable living in the embassy has softened his frame. He muses on how he came here, to stand at this window looking out across the freezing lake, wearing soft lambswool robes. What would that foolish young warlock, roaring the Dragons' names with rod in one hand and shield in the other, deep in the fray, make of the elderly politician he has become? He pats his expansive belly, shakes his head ruefully. A throat is cleared politely behind him, he looks up at the reflection of one of his aides. An ambitious young orc, he thinks, then catches himself. The "young orc" is in her thirties at least. He turns, nods, seats his creaking bones down in his high-backed chair and wonders not for the first time why everything aches even when he has done nothing more strenuous than stare out of a window.

"Letters," says the aide. Rak cannot remember her name. Thran? Thova? Something like that.

"Anything interesting?" He pours himself a goblet of metheglin, still steaming gently, a few spices dissolving on the surface. The aide shakes her head.

"Begging letters mostly, if I may be candid?" The younger orc pauses, waiting for another nod telling her to continue.

"Merchants, traders. Those Five Fangs fools. The only one I think might require your personal attention is from Orathator of the Hourglass and it is just the usual wheedling about the Well of Shadows. I could answer that one as well if you like?"

The offer is made diffidently enough. Rak hides his cynical smirk in his goblet. Thraon, he remembers. Her name is Thraon and she is significantly more capable and more dangerous than

she seems. She wants his job, and she may well have the connections to get it if she keeps on the way she's going, if her faction moves into the ascendant, if he fumbles the negotiations, and the moderates slip down the icy steps before the Dragons' thrones. It's a shame, he muses as he sips his spiced mead, that competence and ambition are often found bound up in the same chains.

"Do not overstep yourself," he cautions calmly. She stiffens, wondering if she has overplayed her hand. "Leave the letter from Orathator, and the one from the Five Fangs. Reply to the others as you see fit but I will read them before they are dispatched. You can go now."

Thraon bows her head, dismissed and rebuked. She touches her amulet, turns to leave, slippers whispering across the thick carpet.

"One last thing," he says as she reaches the door. He is amused to see her shoulders tense, unsure what is coming but expecting the worst.

"Has the wood arrived from the south?" he asks.

"Yes, arrived yesterday along with some coal and several sacks of the Miekarovian charcoal." She sounds relieved, but he has a point to make.

"Yes...?" he prompts her, voice gentle but with a chill undercurrent.

"Yes... Master Rak," she says. She waits ten heartbeats, then when he says nothing more she leaves.

He's glad that the new Ambassador is continuing to keep that polite tradition. He raises his goblet slightly to the shadow of Yevgeni Katzev. This place would be intolerable, he thinks, without that tiny civility, that note of cordiality. But then, if he

moves carefully, if he continues to demonstrate his capabilities to the Dragons, if he can show them he is the living instrument of their undivided will, he may not be here for too much longer. If he can bring this chapter to a satisfactory conclusion, then Thraon can have his seat, and be welcome to it.

He can tolerate another cruel winter in this frigid place, for the promise of something larger and warmer before the snows come again.

Overview

The Empire borders four powerful orc nations; Jotun to the west, Druj to the east, Thule to the north, and Grendel to the south. Four other nations - Skoura, Axos, Faraden, and Iron Confederacy are also close enough that what happens in the Empire effects them directly. In theory, any of those eight nations could threaten Imperial citizens directly – indeed most of them have been at war with the Empire in the past. Some are at war as we speak.

While they may face them on the battlefield, the Empire also maintains diplomatic relations with each of these nations. Some have their own ambassador, some eschew embassies and the task of negotiating with them falls as often as not on the shoulders of the Imperial Consul. From time to time new nations, or new factions within those nations, are discovered, and the Imperial Senate must determine if they are friend or foe. Such was the case with the tiny nation of Tsark, in the Mountains of the Moon. All of these relationships creates a complex web of interconnection and tension, lines of force and compromise. Even on-the-surface simple exchanges might have significant implications for the people of the Empire.

Otkodov

The Thule

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: None
- Ambassador: Kindra Surefoot of Wintermark
- The Empire is at peace with the Thule, but the peace treaty is due to expire soon
- It is clear that they will expect the Empire to pay a heavy price to extend the existing peace treaty

The Empire has enjoyed the benefits of a long but uneasy peace with the Thule of Otkodov, albeit one that came at a steep price. The Thule control regions of almost every territory that borders their land, claiming that the mountains of the northern Empire belong to them. While the cost may have been high, there have also been notable benefits. Cooperation against Jotun and Druj, leading to the liberation of Sermersuaq and the conquest of Ossium. Extensive trade in mana and ilium, in return for food and artisan materials. Most recently, assistance in bringing an end to the dangerous Agramant follower and traitor Maarik the Golden Tongue.

The Thule ambassador to the Empire is Rak-Who-Speaks-For-The-Dragons-Undivided. An older warlock who has several times visited the Empire, he is known as a cynical and somewhat sarcastic individual who is prone to lose his temper with those he considers to be wasting his time or failing to be subtle in their manipulations.

Negotiations

- The Senate passed a specifically worded senate motion demanded before the Thule would reopen negotiations with the Empire
- Rak Who-Speaks-For-The-Dragons-Undivided invites Ambassador Kindra Surefoot to a meeting during the summit at 17:00 on Saturday

The five year peace treaty ratified in 382YE is nearing its end. Due to expire in Summer 387YE, the treaty states that one year before it expires, "the Thule and the Empire will meet together and discuss the state of relations and our further plans going forward." The Empire have indicated they would like to begin these negotiations and while the Dragons seem open to the prospect of an enduring peace with the Empire, it is clear they expect the Empire to pay a further price for it. They welcome any chance to discuss opportunities to trade land for peace, and for greater prosperity for Otkodov. The Thule have claimed more land from the Empire through diplomacy than they have ever conclusively gained through fighting.

During the Summer Solstice the Imperial Senate renounced all claim to Thule lands using words demanded by Rak Who-Speaks-For-The-Dragons-Undivided. The motion recognises that the Silver Peaks, Miechernya, Krevsaty, Crows Ridge, Bonewood, and Webwood are part of Otkodov, now and forever.

The civil service have been clear that this Senate motion has no real legal implication. One cannot bind the hands of a future Senate, so the Empire is under no legal obligation to stick to this statement in the future. But as with any such statement by the Senate, abandoning or renegeing on it without good reason may have wider implications.

Satisfied by the statement, Rak Who-Speaks-With-The-Dragons-Undivided invites the Ambassador to Otkodov, Kindra Surefoot to a parley to discuss continued relations between the Dragons and the Empire. He invites Ambassador Surefoot to bring an aide; it will be a personal meeting rather than anything that would be appropriate to have in a more public venue.

The meeting will take place in the Veislupal; a chamber of the Caucus Forum arranged by Rak. A herald of the Eater-of-Silence will arrive in the Hall of Worlds at 17:00 on Saturday to escort Kindra Surefoot and their aide to the chamber.

Funds and Food

- Rak confirms that Gisli "Provider" Baerson was responsible for providing the large amounts of money that helped Otkodov weather their recent food crisis

One last matter of official correspondence concerns Rak. In Autumn last year, the Thule confirmed that an Imperial citizen had provided a significant amount of money to allow the orcs of Otkodov to purchase much-needed food and help head off widespread famine. At the time Rak refused to comment on who exactly sent the money, but said that if the person responsible came forward or was recognised by the Imperial Synod, he would confirm the truth of the matter. He-Who-Speaks-For-The-Dragons-Undivided has been made aware that the Imperial Synod recognised that Gisli "Provider" Baerson was responsible for raising and providing the funds. He confirms that this matches his understanding of the situation, and makes it clear that Otkodov does not see any reason why the Empire may wish to punish them.

Capital at Risk

- Prognosticators have detected an unusually distant conjunction to the Thule territory of Otkodov
- This appears to an opportunity to investigate rather than for combat but violence cannot be ruled out
- The Civil Service notes that this appears to be the location of a Thule business venture by the Five Fang Consortium that Imperial citizens helped fund
- The Ambassador to Otkodov is responsible for ensuring that the Empire makes the most of this opportunity, whatever it is
- This is a combat Possible encounter

Prior to the Autumn summit the Imperial prognosticators are surprised to find a conjunction that will open far, far to the north of the Empire, in Otkodov. At first they are particularly puzzled and confused by this, especially given the current peace between the Empire and the followers of the Dragons. However some research reveals that recently a number of Imperial citizens have invested in a Thule business venture, and it appears that the conjunction location is connected to this venture in some uncertain fashion. As such, they have asked the Ambassador to Otkodov to assist in determining what is on the other end, but note that any investors in the Five Fang Consortium should consider going also given their money is likely involved somehow.

One of the prognosticators determines that there seems to be an odd confluence of stars associated with the conjunction; the Claw in decline suggesting violence should not be expected, though it should still be considered possible; and the Wanderer in ascension which suggests that those travelling should try to be prepared for anything, and be careful before

making any assumptions about what you see on the other side of the Sentinel Gate. The gate will open at 21:05 on the Friday evening to Shaft #3, Skarlans, Nithoggir, for up to six people.

Skoura

- A treaty between the Empire and Skours has been ratified by the Imperial Senate
- The nation does not desire an embassy and is content to work with the Imperial Consul
- A delegation from Skoura will be attending Anvil around 19.00 on Friday
- They wish to speak variously to the Imperial Consul, Legion Engineer, Senator for Mareave, and a Marcher named Friar John of the Mourn

Skoura

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: None
- Ambassador: Imperial Consul Jarrigk Orzel of Dawn

The nation of Skoura lies directly to the east of Mareave. They once called the Broken Shore their home, but centuries ago were driven back into the mountains by the Grendel. They formed a new way of life based on principles of safety, security and collective industry.

The Empire's relationship with Skoura is neutral, tending positive. The presence of a land border between the two nations and the treaty ratified at the Summer Solstice establishes mutual respect for each other's territory has begun a new period of diplomatic relations. The Skourans do not have an embassy, and

have actively expressed a wish not to have one at this time. As such, diplomatic contact is by letter only, via the office of the Imperial Consul (although some Imperial citizens may have direct routes to speak with individual Skourans of course).

The Delvemistress, Talker Garra, has sent a short message indicating that the Skourans are happy with the recent treaty, and impressed how swiftly it was agreed. She views it as evidence of the Empire's relative maturity and good sense. Reading between the lines, and judging from a few asides, the Civil Service suggest that the Imperial response has made a refreshing change from the regular drama involved in dealing with the Skourans other primary allies, the Citadels of Axos.

One of the provisions of the treaty is that the Empire “will attempt to return, at reasonable costs, any cultural and historical artifacts of the Skouran people that are uncovered as they developed the territory”. Consul Lord Jarrigk Orzel has informed the Skourans that such an item - a schema - has been found in Mareave. As a cultural and historical artifact of the Skouran people, Talker Garra intends to send a representative to collect the item from Anvil, to spare the Empire any undue costs in returning it. The representative plans to meet with the Imperial Consul early on the Firday evening during the summit, presuming that they can arrange a meeting with the citizen who has the schema.

The Consul also appraised the Skourans of the Imperial Orcs interest in rebuilding the ruined aqueduct in Eoradal, believed to be of Skouran make and a relic of their dominance of the territory they called Mahal. The Skourans are interested, but obviously the issue is not the aqueduct itself so much as the water that will flow along it into Imperial Mareave. They are not at this time prepared to commit to trading water to the Empire, not least because Talker Garra indicates that there are

several questions relating to the volume of water that will be required, and the purpose it will be used for. There is a difference, she points out, between enough water to support a modest community and the water required to support dozens of farms across arid Eoradal, or Mareave as a whole. With that in mind, the Delvemistress is sending a second delegation to Anvil, again due to arrive at seven in the evening. Rather than the Imperial Consul, however, these engineers want to talk to the Legion Engineer Groza and Gaddak the Senator for Mareave. Rather surprisingly, they have also requested the presence of a Marcher – Friar John of the Mourn – but apparently that is a personal request from one of the architects rather than anything the Delvemistress mandates for the meeting.

Tsark

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: None
- Ambassador: Imperial Consul Jarrigk Orzel of Dawn

Tsark

- The people of Tsark are technically foreigners, since the Senate has not explicitly defined any relationship with them

Two years ago, construction began on a fortification in Lustri, on the border between Zenith and the Sarangrave. At the time, the isolated people of the Mountains of the Moon sent an emissary, Sage Apollion, who offered the assistance of the people of Tsark, but stipulated strong oaths that the Empire would have to undertake for this support. The oaths revolved around respect for Tsark's decision to isolate themselves, and to forswear from any formal attempt to open diplomatic channels.

The Imperial Senate declined the offer, and the Stork's Gaze now stands proud in the north of Urizen, built with Imperial white granite alone. Since then there has been no official communication between the tiny nation and the Empire.

Despite this official silence, there have been some signs that backchannel communication has taken place with the sagocracy (such as when Sinokenon arranged a meeting on behalf of the Archmage of Day). It's also clear that the nation of Skoura has an interest in the Mountains of the Moon, both from provisions in the recent treaty and information gathered during the Empire's original spying expedition into the territory.

Down From The Moon

- A group of Urizeni and Tsarkoi have descended the mountains into Zenith

All of this would be much of a muchness, except as the Autumn Equinox grows near news reaches Anvil that a number of people come down from the mountains through Mislitel Pass into Occursion. Most of them wear faded and worn Urizeni robes that show signs of having been carefully patched and darned. With them come a small number of Tsark cuvari in distinctive white robes, orcs and humans both. They are led by three individuals dressed in Tsarkoi fabrics but not the cloaks of the cuvari. One is Sage Apollion; another orc identifies himself as Sage Kristoph; and a human who gives their name as Quinta. Sage Kristoph and Quinta also bear what is unmistakably a body, carefully wrapped in a pale blue shroud, green flowers set about the covered head.

The travellers arrive at the Temple of the Wanderer, the spire led by Cato Hypation that stands in a haunted ruin near the foot of the pass. The Senator for Zenith - Herminius of the House of the Wanderer - also lives here, though it's not clear if he was

there in person to greet the arrivals. News of their arrival spreads quickly across the Heliopticon, so that by nightfall most of Urizen knows of what has transpired here.

Sage Apollion explains that they have accompanied a cohort of Urizeni who have, together, decided to "choose the peace of memory's passing", opting to give up all their memories of Tsark and return to Urizen. These returning Imperial citizens had all found their way to Tsark some time in the past, from Zenith or Spiral. In some cases, it has been decades since these Urizeni saw their homes: it seems since that time they have been kept as prisoners on the island of Zabor in the centre of Lake Tsark.

It seems several months ago a number of letters were sent to the prisoners, facilitated by secret negotiations between Sage Kristoph and the Imperial Consul. Whatever their contents, they were powerful enough to encourage many – but by no means all – of the prisoners to agree to lose their memories of their time in Tsark, and come back to Urizen. One of the exceptions is the human Quinta – who is themselves Urizeni by birth but has chosen to take the other choice offered by the people of Tsark – to formally join the People of the Moon, retaining their memories and regaining their freedom in return for the life that Tsark offers.

These Urizen are in a state of some confusion, although they possess the mental discipline to maintain poise despite their obvious confusion. In each case, their memories prior to descending the Mislitel Pass end with them stepping into a pit trap or being caught in a net. Now they are here, years and in some cases decades later, with little memory of the intervening time. For several the Empire and Urizen alike are very different to what they remember; they learn with horror of the Druj invasion, of the rousing of the Black Plateau, of the

conquest of Spiral and its subsequent assignment to the League, of the Varushkan Throne, conquest of Mareave... the events pile up one on the other and each one widens the gulf between these former prisoners and the Urizen around them. The removal of memories appears to be complete – but all are left with the certainty that they chose this; it was not forced upon them. Magical examination indicates that these memories are gone, excised as entirely as they might be by Cast Off The Chain of Memory but on a much larger scale.

The body they have born was Ursula, once the oldest prisoner on Zabor, who, Sage Kristoph explains, "came to them" long ago (in the time of Emperor Ahraz it is quickly calculated). Ursula, not young when she first came to Tsark, died the evening after receiving the letters born through the Consul's diplomatic efforts. She seems to have died peacefully: her body has been carefully preserved with herbs and while Sage Kristoph indicates that he is aware the Urizeni do not care deeply for the body, the decision to repatriate Ursula's remains was taken as a demonstration of deep respect for her personally by Tsark's sagocracy.

Sage Apollion goes on to say that he hopes that the returning Urizeni can be found safe homes while they reconnect to the world they left behind - but that as far as the Tsarkoi are concerned that matter is closed. They broke their laws, were subject to the according penalties, and those have now been discharged. Those that remain on Zabor are few in number, and generally old. They wish to die as Ursula did: with their memories, as proud Urizeni.

Hearts Change

- A delegation from Tsark intends to visit Anvil to increase their understanding of the Imperial nations

- Sage Apollion and Sage Kristoph are particularly interested in meeting people of the League, Wintermark mediators, and Navarr guides
- The former-Urizeni Quinta has been charged to speak to their former countryfolk
- Their delegation is expected to turn up at 20.00 on Saturday

All of this would be a five weeks wonder if not for the fact that these events provoked a discussion among the Council of Sages regarding the matter of Tsark's isolation. Sage Kristoph, who was assigned as a diplomatic envoy, was instrumental in these discussions, and along with Sage Apollion plans to travel to Anvil as representatives of their nation. They intend to meet the various peoples of the Empire in the hope of understanding them a little better – especially those of the League who they understand now rule in Spiral. They also wish to speak to mediators of Wintermark and guides of Navarr, but they hope to visit all of the nations. It's notable that for a tiny nation on the very outskirts of the Empire, the people of Tsark seem to have a remarkable amount of knowledge of the nations and their people. The civil service speculate that this may be down to years of discourse with captured travellers, although there is also evidence that they have close relationships with some of the eternalso so its possible their knowledge in part derives from Sinokenon or Lashonar.

The former Urizen Quinta will also be accompanying them, on a sanctioned mission by the Council of Sages - who have clearly trusted them enough to undertake this task on their own - but they will be speaking directly with the Urizeni of Anvil, who they once called siblings. They wish to explain the reasons for their decision to remain in Tsark in person.

Taking leave of the House of the Wanderer, the two orcs and the

human set off on the long trek west toward Casinea. As a foreign nation with no ambassador, responsibility for dealing with them technically descends to the Imperial Consul. They are expected to arrive around eight in the evening on Saturday during the summit.

Participation

If you are Urizeni, its possible you had a personal relationship with one of the released prisoners – or with someone you suspect may have chosen to remain a captive of Tsark. The former prisoners are currently at the House of the Wanderer, but will of course be free to rejoin their old spires if such exist. All information is that they are sound in body, and their confusion seems to stem from their missing time rather than any injury of the mind or spirit. All evidence suggests that it is impossible to restore their memories of Tsark – just as it is impossible to restore memories removed with Cast Off The Chain of Memory.

A new Urizen character could choose to be one of the former prisoners, but this will not involve any additional briefing or information simply because all memory of Tsark has been removed. It might make an interesting character idea to play someone who has years or decades of “missing time” - and who can portray someone broadly unaware of recent Imperial history prior to their return.

Asavea

- The Asavean Archipelago and the Empire are at war
- The Asaveans are supporting the Grendel, and attempting to convert the Faraden to their cause
- The arrival of missionaries of the Way has further enraged the

Asaveans

Imperial relations with the Asavean Archipelago continue to decline, despite efforts from the ambassador to turn them around. The Asaveans remain at war with the Empire, and while they are likely smarting over the failed attack on Mead, it will not have dented their desire for revenge. They remain incensed by the decision of the Empire to send missionaries to their shores, rightly regarding it as an existential threat against the rule of the Plenum. For as long as the missionaries continue to travel to Asavea, they are certain to remain implacably hostile to the Empire.

In addition to their open support for the Grendel, both through gifts of materials and money and through the deployment of powerful Asavean warships in Imperial waters, there are signs that agents from the west are attempting to influence the Faraden to ally with them against the Empire. There are also rumours of Asavean involvement in the Iron Confederacy and even Axos. The Plenum may be corrupt, and the Asavean star in decline, but they were an old and experienced nation when the Empire was founded. The tricks of diplomacy and espionage come easily to them and it seems that they are prepared to put them all in service of humbling the Imperial Senate.

Attempts by the Imperial Senate to plough a different furrow were stymied by the decision of a member of the Synod to seek the veto. As a result, the Asaveans have made good on their threat to put a bounty on any ships travelling to or from Imperial ports. Now any hope of peace hangs on the final decision of the Synod whether to make good on their threat to veto the motion or not.

Asavean Archipelago

- Status: Barbarian

- Ports: Nemoria (closed)
- Ambassador: Asier i Elia i Guerra of the Brass Coast

A Firm Rebuttal

- Attempts to identify a compromise have been firmly rebutted by the Asaveans
- The Empire would need to stop sending missionaries to Asavea for at least a year before any negotiations could begin

Thus far, efforts to find a diplomatic way to de-escalate the growing conflict have failed, despite efforts from the Empire's diplomats. Attempts to convince Lady Madrianna that the Synod does not seek to overthrow the Plenum have foundered in the face of the stark reality that if the priests of the Way succeed in converting the Asaveans, then it is guaranteed to bring about the Plenum's demise and the destruction of the system of temples that maintain their society. It is clear that the Plenum understand the threat that the Empire's priests represents.

Lady Madrianna herself appears to have been infuriated by the suggestion that Asavea needs to "appease" the Synod; that they should simply allow a religion antithetical to Asavean culture and tradition to flourish. In very precise language she points out that this has already been tried, with the temple in Nemoria, and that the result was a disaster. Further she is at pains to note the astonishing hypocrisy of the ambassador's position. It is illegal to preach anything but the Way in the Empire, but the Plenum should let the Empire's risible godless religion spread in Asavea?

In theory it might be possible to find a way back from this conflict, but tempers are running high in Asavea. Even leaving

aside the attack on Chalonsio, or the Empire's open support of the Sumaah Republic, the current crises has been further exacerbated by the brutal murder of several powerful members of the Tarquinius family by followers of the Way; a rebellion in one of the satrapies openly sponsored by Asavean pilgrims; and the destruction of the old Temple of the Way in Nemoria that claimed numerous lives as part of a plan sponsored by an open follower of the Way. At the moment, any attempt to persuade the Plenum that the desire to convert the Asavean to the Way is not part of a direct attack on their power is doomed to failure.

There is no possibility of the Empire opening new negotiations with Asavea while priests continue to travel there to spread the Way. The Empire would have to demonstrate good faith by ensuring that no priests travelled to Asavea to proselytise the faith for at least a year before any diplomacy might be possible.

Priestly Prisoners

- A number of Asavean priests from the Temple of Balo and the Black Bull have surrendered to the Freeborn generals

One matter the Ambassador may wish to involve themselves with is the fate of the priests of Balo and the Black Bull currently in the custody of the generals of the Brass Coast. Following the siege of Oran in Feroz, perhaps thirty priests and acolytes surrendered, specifically to the Freeborn commanders (as detailed in the Glass and flame wind of war). Currently under guard in Oran, they claim that they have done nothing to harm Imperial citizens and that in fact they did everything they could to help their Freeborn friends avoid the grasp of the Grendel governor. They have asked to be repatriated to Asavea. The decision about what to do with these barbarians – whether to execute them as enemies of the Empire or returned to their people – lies with a majority decision of the three Freeborn

generals. The Herald of the Council waits to hear their decision. Executing the priests will send a powerful message to Asavea, and will likely be seen by the Freeborn people as just retribution for the destruction of Shantarim and the Isle of Osseini, for the burning of Siroc, and for the recent murder of Imperial missionaries in Asavea.

Regardless of the generals' decision, it will fall to the Ambassador to communicate their fate to Asave. If they are to be repatriated, if a ransom is demanded, or if their bodies are to be returned to the Asasveans, the Ambassador is in the best position to handle any negotiations involved.

Red Sails

- The Plenum has followed through on their threat to attack any ship trading with the Empire if the Empire continue sending missionaries to Asavea
- Imperial fleers gain one rank when trading with Sumaah, the Commonwealth and the Sarcophan Delves
- Imperial taxation has dropped by 62 thrones

The Asavean plenum has placed a bounty on any fleet trading with the Empire, just as they promised they would if the tide of missionaries continued (see last season's Drumbeat of war wind of fortune). Priests of Vebar, Mistress of the Tides of the Sun and Moon, will provide blessings to any Asavean vessel prepared to attack any ship visiting Imperial ports, seeking to capture the ship, steal their cargo, and enslave their crews. The impact of the effect has already been felt, with traders from the Sarcophan Delves, Commonwealth merchants, and Sumaah ships all being attacked by privateers. The bounty is not only open to Asavean vessels; opportunistic pirates and raiders alike have been apprised of it and seek to take advantage.

This move cannot help but escalate the conflict. The Sarcophan Delves have already protested the move, and it is clear the Commonwealth are preparing to take steps that will likely make the situation even more chaotic. The Asavean plenum clearly believes it is worth the price however - the Commonwealth, like the Empire and Sumaah, has few navies and relatively few fleets and the Sarcophan are very unlikely to risk war with any of the Great Powers.

Asavean vessels won't currently enter the Bay of Catazar, but they can still impose a heavy toll on Imperial trade elsewhere. There are already noticeably fewer Sumaash, Commonwealth, and Sarcophan merchant ships reaching Imperial ports, either because they have been captured by the Asaveans or because they have gone elsewhere in search of safer profits. This has resulted in an ongoing loss to the Imperial treasury, estimated at 62 Thrones this season, which will persist for as long as the attacks last. At the moment there has been no direct impact on the various ministries and sinecures supported by foreign trade - those invested in such trade routes have taken steps to defend their ships and are clearly hoping the threat can be ended before it impacts their profits too much - but there is no guarantee that state of affairs will continue. It's unlikely to end trades such as the Steel Fist, or the Concordium Dock but it may reduce the amount of goods available, or increase the prices foreign merchants demand to make the risk of piracy more palatable.

Somewhat perversely, Imperial fleets trading with Sumaah, the Commonwealth, or Sarcophan Delves will see a small boost to their profits (gaining the equivalent of a single rank). Imperial goods will become harder to obtain in these ports, improving demand and profits.

This action is not without cost to the Plenum - they are paying the equivalent of up to a hundred Thrones a season in

bounties, to say nothing of the diplomatic repercussions of attacking other nation's shipping. The fact that they are prepared to swallow those costs is evidence of just how seriously they take the threat posed by Imperial missionaries, and a taste of what they might do to fight back as the threat grows more real.

Missionary Matters

- Imperial missionaries continue to travel to Asavea

While the Senate voted to make preaching in Asavea illegal, the Imperial Synod doubled-down on its commitment to bringing the way to the Archipelago by any means necessary. Further details can be found in the Irreconcilable differences wind of fortune.

Jarm

- Jarm remains at peace with the Empire, but relations are extremely frosty

Jarm

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: Kavor, Vezak, Rigia (all closed)
- Ambassador: Nikita Teanga Volkov of Varushka

One of the six great powers, the Principalities of Jarm are no friends to the Empire. The magocracy, ruled by the House of Princes resents what it claims are repeated attempts by Imperial citizens to interfere with its interests. Via the Liberty Pact, the Empire is allied with Jarm's enemies, the Commonwealth, and open war now rages between the two great nations. They may not be at war with the Empire, but they know that Imperial citizens and the Imperial Conclave in particular have provided

significant assistance to their rivals. Communications tend to be brusque, bordering on the curt.

The Jarmish ambassador to the Empire is Lord-Magister Anton Trescher of the Hidden Hook, Who attends at the House of Princes. A canny and influential politician who has served the House of Princes for over forty years, he represents the Jarmish to the Empire and vice-versa. A potent master of Autumn magic, he is known for his sarcasm and dry wit, and for his commitment to the sovereignty of the Principalities he serves.

War in the East

- The decision not to allow mercenaries to fight with the Commonwealth has been well received

Jarm is engaged in a brutal war with the Commonwealth (also discussed in the Beneath mithril spires wind of fortune.

Ambassador Nikira Teanga Volkov has assured Lord-Magister Trescher that the Empire respects that the conflict is between Jarm and the Commonwealth; while it is aligned with the Commonwealth on matters of trade, the Empire does not wish to involve itself in their conflict. News that the Imperial Senate has not granted permission for Imperial mercenaries to fight alongside the Commonwealth armies has reached the Principalities, and Lord-Magister Trescher offers grudging approval.

The House of Princes are aware of the decision, and it is seen as a first faltering step toward a potential future detente between Jarm and the Empire. Obviously the scales are not balanced - the Imperial Conclave shared Imperial lore with the Commonwealth but refuses to share any rituals with Jarmish magicians and the Principalities cannot trade with the Empire's ports without "punishing tariffs" - but coupled with the professional tone of the new Ambassador's letters, it represents

the first real positive improvement in relations between the two great nations in some time. It is, after all, the insistence in intruding into other nations' affairs that is the root of much of the Jarmish anger with the Empire.

Despite this understanding, Lord-Magister Trescher makes it clear that if Imperial mercenaries do turn up in battles between Jarmish and Commonwealth forces, the House of Princes will view it as a declaration of war by the Empire and respond appropriately. It is unfortunate that the Imperial Senate still finds itself unable to formally pronounce its intention to remain neutral in the war between Jarm and the Commonwealth, making it difficult for many magician-princes to trust their sincerity.

Shield Against Folly

- The Jarmish possess the artefact-relic Measure
- They have repeated their offer to exchange the shield for a ritual text of Brotherhood of Tian
- They are also prepared to offer 10 rings of ilium to whichever Conclave order disseminates the ritual text to them
- If that happens, they will also pay the Imperial Senate 100 thrones to "cover the costs" of transporting the ritual text to Jarm
- If the Conclave declines the trade, it will not be repeated and the opportunity to gain Measure will be lost, potentially permanently

Last season Lord-Magister Trescher communicated an offer from the House of Princes regarding Measure, the original Pilgrim's Shield of Wisdom gifted the Seven Pilgrims by Ezkiah the Benefactor. They know that in Imperial eyes it is

the property of the Champion of Wisdom. Securing the shield required the Imperial Conclave to disseminate the ritual Brotherhood of Tian. In addition to the shield the House of Princes offered obvious inducements to encourage the Empire to provide the ritual they desired - 100 Thrones to the Imperial senate "to cover any transportation costs", and 10 rings of ilium to the Conclave order whose Grandmaster enacts the declaration "in recompense for their time, and their assistance in the matter".

The Varushkan Ambassador has informed the Jarmish that the Conclave is unlikely to agree to this proposal, and was concerned that going ahead in the current climate would risk defeat and consequently make it harder to raise the declaration in future. After speaking the House, Lord-Magister Anton asks that the Ambassador follow through on their offer to see the dissemination raised even if it doing so serve merely as a way for malcontents to air their imagined grievances against the Principalities. The reality is that the Empire are not the only people interested in the shield, and if the Conclave is not prepared to provide the ritual - and the Ambassador cannot made a convincing counter-offer on the same scale - then the shield will instead be traded to someone else. Lord-Magister Anton will not say who the shield will be traded to, merely noting that it is extremely unlikely any Imperial citizen will ever see it again. "It would be a shame to see an end brought to the centuries long tradition of arming one of the foremost champions of your faith with this fabled tool," says the Jarmish diplomat.

The civil service believe this is no idle threat; from the context it is clear that the Jarmish intend to provide the shield either to someone who will destroy it, or someone who will put it beyond Imperial reach, should the Conclave refuse their offer. They are very clearly attempting to use possession of the shield

as leverage to get what they want.

Artificers

Item	Quantity	Price Per Item
The Fountain of Thorns	5	53 Crowns
The Spider's Web	5	55 Crowns
Amberglass Orb	8	20 Crowns
Greensteel Orb	9	21 Crowns
Altruist's Recompense	15	14 Crowns
Bloodsilver Spike	20	16 Crowns

- Jarmish merchants of the Circle of Six are interested in purchasing ritual paraphernalia and other items from the Artisans Guild

Also last season, Lord-Magister Trescher communicated an offer from a Jarmish merchant Bojana Etura of the Circle of Six interested in making a deal with the Artisans Guild via their Guildmaster Xanthius. They were particularly interested in magical ritual paraphernalia that could be used by Jarmish magicians, to help them fill the increased demand from their customers as the war with the Commonwealth continues. The Empire embargos Jarmish traders from visiting its ports but it is the House of Princes that will not let Imperial fleets Jarmish ports. As such there is no legal impediment on the Imperial side to citizens in a position to make a trade and the involvement of Lord Trescher bespeaks the approval of the House of Princes.

The Imperial Ambassador, however, reports that any support for the Circle of Six would represent military involvement in the ongoing conflict between Jarm and the Commonwealth.

However, they have a counter-proposal. War can bring about destruction and the loss of food and resources, they point out, and as such the Artisan's Guild might be persuaded to offer different kinds of items. Bojana Etura has responded with a second offer, focused around the lores of Spring magic and Autumn magic - realms that heal and restore prosperity in times of war.

If the Artisans Guild is prepared to provide some or all of these items (or those previously requested - those offers are still open), and the Ambassador can pass on which items and how many, then a representative of the Circle of Six will travel to Anvil during the Winter Solstice to take possession of the items, pay the agreed price, and discuss future trades. If not, Bojana Etura will have to look elsewhere to fill their lucrative orders - and will be forced to advise their peers that trade with the Empire remains impossible.

Non Attendance

Grendel

- Status: Barbarian
- Ports: Dubhtraig (closed)
- Ambassador: Finna of the Brass Coast
- The Empire is at war with the Grendel of the Broken Shore, but the Grendel have not completely cut off diplomatic relations

The Empire remains at war with the Grendel and the orcs of the Broken Shore. They have struck decisively into Feroz, and is heavily engaged in Ayereed. There is a major force - armies and navies alike - still in Madruga as near as anyone can tell, although with the recent developments there making scrying

difficult there's no confirmation of what they are doing. There are reports of conflicts between Imperial ships and Grendel vessels, and skirmished cross the Bay where both sides are engaged with the Children of Wrecks. Yet the one thing there is not is an appearance at Anvil by Speaker Morna.

After due consideration, the Grendel diplomat sees little benefit to himself or the Salt Lords Council attending Anvil this summit. He reassures his opposite number that he is still keen to correspond, but will not be returning to Anvil until there is something of substance to discuss - like a proposal for how the two nations might deal with the mutual threat of the Children of Wrecks. The price of the Ambassador's time is simply not worth the benefits it offers at the moment.