

A stone for a stone

"I don't like this Naimes." the grizzled Varushkan scowled, his displeasure written all over this face. "It's too dangerous."

She rolled her eyes, much as she enjoyed her guard's company, the constant protectiveness was a burden when it got in the way of her work. "We've been through this a dozen times already Leszek. I am going to the Jotun camp. And you are going back north to wait here, for me to return."

"Gerard would say no. It's too dangerous. He wouldn't let you do this." It was the wily Varushkan's last roll of the dice. He'd left this argument to the last fearing it wouldn't work even if it was true.

"Gerard La Salle is a thousand miles away in the Castle of Thorns. I will be perfectly safe."

"At least let me go with you Naimes," he pleaded "I'm sworn to protect you..."

She almost took pity on her old travelling companion, but she steeled her heart. Much as she desperately didn't want to do this alone, she had no choice. Leszek was an experienced and canny warrior, five years service in the Imperial army, promoted once for Courage and twice for Loyalty. There were few more intimidating, a wall of muscle encased in steel, with a brutal scar running down his left cheek just in case anyone thought it was all just for show.

"If anything goes wrong then you can't possibly protect me. Jarl Haakon has what? Fifty thousand? Sixty? Are you going to fight them all?"

The grim schlacta scowled again. Being unable to deny her logic wasn't making him any happier.

"I'll be fine Leszek." she reassured him one last time. "With you, we'd both be in terrible danger. The Jarl might see you as a threat and attack. But alone I will be absolutely fine. I will be safer in that camp than I would be in the Castle of Thorns. The Jarl won't let anyone harm a hair on my head."

"You don't know that!" he retorted. "You're just guessing..."

Now it was Naomi's turn to look annoyed. Her eyes narrowed, a sure sign her temper was rising. "I'm a prognosticator," she retorted, "I never guess..."

Overview

- The Imperial Senate has commissioned Naomi of Virtue's Rest to explore ways to make peace more appealing to the Jotun
- As part of their appraisal, Naomi has prepared a short report examining relations with the western barbarians

The Imperial Senate has instructed Naomi of Virtue's Rest to appraise what might make peace more appealing for the Jotun. It is an astutely worded appraisal - Naomi is a skilled diplomat, but few expect her to be able to deliver peace with the Western orcs on request. But if there are steps that could be taken to help engender a peace in the future, then the prognosticator is the one most likely to find them.

Naomi has done what work she can in the Empire, talking to the Marcher orcs who know the Jotun best; studying the history of the Empire's wars with the western barbarians to see what patterns she can discern; and looking at the most recent conflict to try to understand the causes of it.

Finally, with few other good alternatives, she made a short trip under a flag of truce to speak with the Jotun in Mournwold. The

journey was dangerous, but she reports that the Jotun treated her well, and though she gained only a limited opportunity to talk with any of the Jarls there, it was enough to confirm her ideas held water.

A Long History Of War

- The Jotun are born to war, conquerors by nature, who seek an honourable death in battle
- The Empire has always either been at war with the Jotun, or preparing to be at war with them during brief interludes of peace

Throughout Wintermark and Imperial history there have been sporadic periods of peace with the Jotun. During the reign of Emperor Guntherm, the Empire and the Jotun even allied together to fight a sustained campaign against the Thule. However these periods of peace have never lasted long, rarely more than five or ten years at the absolute outside.

There appear to be two key reasons for this. The first is that the Jotun claim that much of the Western Empire belongs to them. They claim

that Sermersuaq, Hahnmark, Kallavesa, Mitwold, Mournwold, Kahraman, and Segura or at least part of them, all belong to the Jotun. There is even a sept of orcs in Tromsa that claims that, before the Terunael came, the woods and peaks of Hercynia were their domain. The orcs regard these lands as fundamentally "Jotun" in much the same way that the Marchers view Mitwold as Marcher lands or the people of Dawn view Astolat as Dawnish. According to their history, they have been systematically pushed from their lands, forced ever further westwards. In their eyes, they are fighting a war to try to recapture the lands they have lost to the Empire.

Perhaps more importantly however, are the Jotun beliefs. They are a devout people, their ghodi - their priests - are second only to their Jarls in importance. The ghodi teach them that they can only cross the Howling Abyss if they die in battle fighting. The Jotun dislike of open water seems to stem from this - their warriors seem to have a dread fear of death by drowning.

This belief ensures the Jotun have to be at war with someone almost all the time; otherwise they are condemning their warriors to oblivion when they die. One of the things that makes peace with the Jotun so difficult is the Jotun prize worthy opponents above all other things because they believe the more worthy the opponent that kills them, the more likely the faðir are to choose to take them over the Abyss. The more respect the Jotun have for someone, the more keen they are to go to war with them.

A lasting peace with the Jotun therefore looks almost impossible. There are no scenarios where the Empire would ever be likely to give up the lands the Jotun claim as their own, and it is not clear the Jotun even want them to. In negotiations the Jotun have repeatedly demonstrated that they would rather have the chance to fight for something, and claim it in battle, then be given it.

None-the-less there have been periods of peace. The Jotun use these periods to fight other nations, fight each other, or more often to build up their strength in preparation for their next war with the Empire. The Jotun refer to these periods of peace as "rests", a chance to recover their strength, like a long night's sleep.

It is outside Naomi's capabilities to provide the Empire with a way to secure an enduring peace with the Jotun, but she does have some ideas that would help stop the fighting for a few years.

A Short History Of War

- Relations with the Jotun have been fraught since the death of Empress Britta

Naomi's first action is to look at the recent history with the Jotun, the events of the last ten years. In Spring 377YE the Imperial Senate guaranteed safe passage to Anvil for a delegation from the west. Such a delegation arrived that Summer and successfully negotiated a ceasefire with the Empire for two years. There was a request to extend the peace treaty in 378YE which was initially rebuffed by the Imperial Senate. But that rejection was itself vetoed by the Imperial Synod, leading the Senate to change its mind and later pass the request. That meant that the peace should have lasted until the start of the Spring Equinox 380YE.

Unfortunately, the Jotun used peace with the Empire as an opportunity to attack their neighbours, first the Faraden and then the orcs of the Lasambrian hills. The Empire intervened in both conflicts. No armies were sent, but scores of independent military units were sent to Faraden to try to help them hold off the Jotun. In the end it was enough to ensure the Jotun knew they were there, and taking part in the fight, but not enough to make the difference. The Faraden were defeated and forced to sue for peace on Jotun terms. Messages from the Jotun made clear that they were furious about the Empire taking sides in the fight. The fragile peace still held, but it would definitely break if Imperial forces fought against the Jotun again.

With the Faraden defeated, the Jotun invaded the lands of the Lasambrian orcs, seeking to subjugate them. The desperate Lasambrians sent diplomats to Anvil to beg for aid and a hasty treaty was drawn up. The new treaty required the Imperial Senate to abrogate their ceasefire with the Jotun allowing Imperial captains to march to the aid of the Lasambrians, but no

word of this decision was sent to the Jotun. They are known to have been infuriated by what they perceived as an act of treachery, the breaking of a sworn treaty.

Despite this, there is evidence that the Jotun still attempted to agree terms for the war with the Imperial generals. There are accounts of a meeting between the Jotun jarls and the Imperial generals where both sides agree not to use widescale destructive magic against the other. Unfortunately, there seem to be no official records of this agreement and it does not appear to have been ratified by the Imperial Senate - but if such terms were agreed then the subsequent violation of the agreement undoubtedly served to further anger the Jotun.

Spring 380YE marked the beginning of a year of bloody warfare between the Empire and the Jotun with Imperial forces smashing into the Jotun armies in the Mournwold trying to break them and drive them back. The Jotun committed themselves to a heroic defence of the lands, refusing to cede even an inch in the face of the attack. Thousands were killed on both sides, a pattern that continued in the seasons to follow, culminating in the terrible curses unleashed almost exactly a year later.

Although the Jotun were victorious it was a pyrrhic victory, with around twelve thousand Jotun warriors killed by Imperial defenders and the twin curses inflicted on the territory. Worse, the combination of fell magic employed scythed through the population of the Mournwold, killing nearly one- in every six people, both orc thralls and Imperials. The young and the old were especially vulnerable. The losses broke the strength of the Jotun armies and although they were able to complete the conquest of the Mournwold, they could not hold it. The Empire returned in force the very next season, the Iron Helms leading the way, cruelly butchering any Jotun they could get their hands

on.

Some might argue the curses were a pyrrhic victory for the Empire also. It turned the Mournwold against the Empire, a resentment that still lingers in Bregasland and parts of the Marches to this day. Worse it filled the Jotun with hatred for the Empire. They claim to have a sacred obligation to protect their thralls - the Jotun are supposed to fight and die to protect those who labour on their behalf. They believed themselves dishonoured by the Empire's curses. They have utterly rebuffed every single peace entreaty by the Empire since that day. The Jarl of Keirheim has repeatedly said that the Jotun cannot declare peace with the Empire until every single Jotun warrior who was dishonoured that day is dead.

They have kept to that position ever since.

Fighting With Honour

- The Jotun respect the heroic efforts of Wintermark to match their honour on the battlefield
- Recent Freeborn efforts seem to have significantly improved their standing in Jotun eyes
- The Jotun absolutely despise the Navarr

The deaths of so many in the Mournwold appear to have been a turning point in the Empire's wars with the Jotun. Since then, some nations have adopted a different approach. This has been largely pioneered by Wintermark who took the decision to fight with honour when taking the field against the Jotun. The campaign to retake Sermersuaq after the Jotun captured the territory soon took on a different tone, with the Jotun conspicuously allowing Imperial forces to recover the wounded and the dead from the battlefield.

It is absolutely clear that the consistent use of this approach by the Wintermark generals has earned the respect of the Jotun. Correspondence from the Jotun makes repeated references to the people of the Mark "regaining their honour". The Jotun seem almost eager to believe that the Winterfolk had somehow lost their honour in earlier engagements but have now recovered it. After years of this approach, recent events have shown over and over that Wintermark has earned a high level of trust with the Jotun. What this approach has not delivered is any indication that the Jotun have even the slightest interest in a ceasefire.

The Freeborn also appear to have won the respect of the Jotun, most notably with the decision to raise a barrow over the Jotun dead slain when Fort Braydon fell. This slow move towards respect may have begun with actions taken by Avisena i Kharizmi i Guerra. It is not actually clear what the former long-serving senator of Segura did to win the Jotun's respect, but whatever it was made a deep impression. They refer to her as "the Golden Jarl" (they often refer to the Freeborn as the Golden People). Jarl Ustigar has repeatedly demonstrated that he holds Avisena in the highest regard, but it is not just Avisena, at least not anymore. King Gudmundur Arunsun sent his daughter to negotiate with the Freeborn and was clear that he regards the people of the Brass Coast as honest enemies.

The decision of the Imperial generals not to attack Mount Majastind during their invasion of Tromsa may have been the most important step in transforming the Jotun view of the nations involved. The bones of their most important ancestor, Ulven, are believed to be interred in the mountain along with at least three powerful artefacts. It is the Jotun's most sacred site, and they made that clear to the Empire, in the belief that if the Empire knew the important it held, they would refrain from attacking the mountain.

Despite these changes, one factor has remained constant throughout all recent relations with the Jotun - they continue to despise the Navarr and regard them with utter contempt. They refer to them as "human Druj" in tones that make clear what a grievous insult they consider that to be. They offer no quarter to the Navarr in battle, they don't offer them the choice, they simply kill any Navarr they can find. The loathing the Jotun express for the Navarr seems to have historic roots, and while it has clearly been exacerbated by experiences fighting their armies or facing their champions in skirmishes, it may not affect the ability to secure a cessation of hostilities.

Fighting For Peace

- No single action will make peace with the Jotun
- There are steps that could be taken to make a ceasefire more achievable

According to Naomi there is no one single gesture, investment or act that would make peace with the Jotun, but there are a number of actions that the Empire could take all of which would help to create some of the conditions that are either necessary for a period of peace to happen or which would facilitate it.

Kill Jarl Haakon

- Jarl Haakon is the leader of the Jotun who once ruled the Mournwold
- Killing Jarl Haakon is a necessary but not sufficient condition for peace

The Jotun believe they were dishonoured by the deaths of their thralls in the Mournwold. Now, they insist they cannot make

peace with the Empire until every single orc responsible for protecting the thralls has died in battle against the Empire. The Jotun are absolutely committed to this, prepared to fight to the bitter end, even if the means the destruction of both Jotun kingdoms.

Fortunately, it appears that this religious demand does not require the Empire to kill every single Jotun warrior. But it includes every Jotun who is judged to have been responsible for the safety of the Mournwold thralls, especially those Jotun who held lands there when the Empire attacked.

Many have already passed. The Jotun are forbidden by their Jarls and their godhi from throwing their lives away in pointless combat. Their ancestors apparently will not take those who fight and die for no reason. As a consequence, the Jotun will usually retreat when a battle is lost, rather than fight to the last orc. But when the Empire defeated the Jotun in Kahraman, a large group of Jotun were given permission to fight to the death at Fort Braydon because the godhi had consulted the faðir and identified that doing so would yield a strategic benefit for the nation.

Those who died when the fort fell were all Jotun who had lost their honour in the Mournwold. Naomi believes this could be a subtle sign that some of the Jotun leaders may be deliberately creating conditions for peace. But they won't contemplate an end to war with the Empire while any of the affected Jotun still live. It's impossible for Naomi to identify the names of every Jotun, but Jarl Haakon was the Jarl who ruled the Mournwold. If there is any single Jotun who absolutely must die before there can be peace, it is Jarl Haakon. There is no possibility that the Jotun will stop fighting; until Jarl Haakon is dead, preferably at the hands of Imperial warriors fighting them in battle.

Killing Jarl Haakon is a necessary but not sufficient condition

for peace. Peace will only be possible once the Jarl is slain, but it will not be enough by itself. The Empire will need to take other steps as well.

Avoid Another Mournwold

- The Jotun will not make peace with the Empire if they have been dishonoured
- Avoiding another Mournwold is a necessary but not sufficient condition for peace

Wintermark has put in considerable work to repair their relations with the Jotun, repeatedly fighting with honour on campaign, to earn their respect. There is no evidence at all that this has made the Jotun want to make peace with the Empire. To the contrary, the Jotun seem more eager to fight Wintermark, now they regard them as honourable and worthy foes. Likewise, with the Freeborn and to a lesser extent, the Marchers - the more the Jotun come to respect these nations, the more enthusiastic they are to fight them.

However the Mournwold curses demonstrate the dangers in taking the opposite approach. If the Empire take actions that cause the Jotun to lose honour, such as killing their thralls, then that will make them utterly committed to war against the Empire. This is exactly what happened in the Mournwold, when Imperial curses wiped out a sixth of the population. Any similar action in the future would create a similar impediment to peace.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to know for sure what actions will cause the Jotun to lose honour. The Jotun notion of honour is complex and somewhat arbitrary in Naomi's eyes. For example they disapprove of magicians calling heralds of Winter to fight alongside the armies, but they have no issue with heralds of the Summer realm doing the same.

The safest way to ensure that no Imperial army accidentally transgresses these unknown rules may be for at least one Wintermark army to fight with honour in any campaign against that Jotun. That should ensure that no army can perpetuate the kind of action that will dishonour the Jotun at least.

Avoiding such acts is a necessary but not sufficient condition for peace. Peace will only be possible if the Empire avoids committing any further atrocities, but it will not be enough by itself. The Empire will need to take other steps as well.

Start Another War

- The Jotun want to fight a strong Empire, they will be more receptive to peace with a weakened Empire
- They are more likely to accept peace if the Empire start another war with the Thule or the Vallorn

It is often claimed that the Jotun enjoy war, or that they live for it. The situation appears to be more complicated than that, but they are the most religious of all the orc nations that border the Empire. Their ancestors, their "gods", tell them they can only pass over the Howling Abyss if they die in a battle against a worthy opponent.

These beliefs determine the Jotun approach to war. In their eyes, there is no honour in poisoning opponents, or ambushing them. They have no hesitating in seeking to outmanoeuvre their enemy, but they don't try to ambush them or take them by surprise and they have contempt for those who use such tactics. The Jotun are often considered to know little magic, but that isn't quite true. Rather they won't use magic like Rivers Run Red in war, because they consider it dishonourable. They don't go to war against the Empire for victory - they do it for the chance to fight and die against a worthy opponent. Using magic

to kill the enemy defeats the whole point of war in their eyes, reducing a noble act to one of simple murder.

The Jotun want to retake the lands they regard as theirs, but they don't want to be given them, they want to fight the Empire for them. Crucially if the Empire was unable to mount an effective defence, perhaps because they are fighting too many wars elsewhere, then the Grendel, the Druj or the Thule would pounce on that weakness. They would try to turn the situation to their advantage, either by attacking harder or by demanding concessions in exchange for peace. But the Jotun would do the opposite - they would be more likely to agree to a ceasefire with the Empire if they know the Empire cannot field enough armies to fight them - and they will make fewer demands of the Empire.

The Jotun jarls fight wars the same way their warriors fight. If a Jotun warrior came across a sleeping enemy, they would wait for them to awaken, and then give them time to put their armour on and gather their weapons. There is no honour in their mind in slaughtering a helpless foe. If the Empire start a war with the Thule, or with the vallorn, while they are still fighting the Druj and the Grendel, then the Jotun may consider that a good reason for a temporary peace. They would want to wait until the Empire were strong enough to face them. They would view the Empire as a sleeping warrior, who must be given time to ready themselves.

More so than any other step mentioned in the appraisal, Naomi is careful to point out that no one action is going to make peace happen. Starting a war with the Thule, or unleashing the vallorn, without taking other steps towards making a ceasefire achievable, could potentially be cataclysmic.

Inflict a Major Defeat

- The Jotun will be more receptive to peace if the Empire has weakened them
- They are more likely to accept peace if the Empire inflicts a major defeat on them that leaves them weakened

The opposite approach is also true - the Jotun want to put up an effective fight. Their gods do not honour those warriors who continue to fight after the battle is lost. If they are clearly losing a war with the Empire, if they are clearly beaten and unable to field enough armies to hold off the Empire's attack, they would consider that a good reason for a temporary peace.

Of course any enemy is more likely to sue for peace if they are losing, but the Empire's other enemies will all resent being defeated in this way. They would expect the Empire to demand concessions of them for beating them. The Jotun would take the opposite view, they won't expect the Empire to demand concessions (though they will definitely resent any that are taken), but they won't resent the Empire for defeating them.

Instead they will respect the Empire for "honourably" claiming victory. They will assume that the Empire is motivated by the same desire as they are - a wish to oppose a strong opponent who can give them a worthy fight. Just as the Jotun will allow the Empire to withdraw from a battlefield when the battle is lost, they believe the Empire should do the same - at least if they are acting in a moral way.

If the Empire inflicts a major defeat on the Jotun, one that leaves them weakened and unable to field enough armies to mount an effective defence of their lands then they will be more likely to sue for peace.

Agree Terms For War

- The Jotun like to agree terms for war, which can include agreements when the war will end
- They are more likely to accept peace if the Empire agree terms for a limited war
- If the Empire agree terms and then violate them, it will prevent peace for another generation

The Jotun are strong proponents of the idea of limited war. In the past, the Empire's leaders have met with the Jotun and agreed terms for war. Usually this takes place on the cusp of conflict, but it has happened when war is already raging. The purpose of such negotiations is to agree the basis on which the war will be fought. The Jotun will usually use such meetings to push for restrictions on the use of widescale magic, prohibitions on the use of poison, and so forth. The Empire might be able to negotiate their own terms for the remainder of the current war, potentially even including conditions for what might end the war.

If the Empire are able to negotiate terms for a limited war with the Jotun then that will make them more open to the idea of a cessation of hostilities in the future. They will need to be confident that they can trust the Empire to stick to the terms, at present they are only certain to be confident of a deal if it is vouched for by the Golden Jarl, but they may be other interlocuters who could assure a deal. The Empire could invoke the lictors if they wanted to assure the Jotun of their intention to honour a deal - but doing so presents its own dangers should they prove unable or unwilling to abide by their agreement.

There is a clear flaw with this approach. If the Empire negotiates terms for limited war with the Jotun and then breaks those terms, then it will be a disaster. The personal reputation of

everyone involved will be irrevocably tarnished and depending on how the agreement is breached, it could prevent peace for another generation, just as the curses in the Mournwold did.

Engaging in such negotiations would be substantially easier if the Empire had an acceptable Meeting Place where they could meet with the Jotun.

Create A New Meeting Place

- The Jotun place great store in hospitality and safe places to meet and talk
- They are more likely to accept peace if the Empire commissions a monument as a new meeting place
- The bigger the commission, the greater the impact it will have

The Meeting Place was an unremarkable stone by a wooded glade that was used as a place of truce where the Jotun and Wintermark could meet. The Jotun considered it to be sacred, a place of peace where violence was forbidden. It was used when Emperor Guntherm negotiated a ceasefire with the Jotun leaders, but it may well have predated this event.

The site was desecrated by Imperial citizens in 382YE who it is rumoured were acting at the behest of Agramant. The Jotun in the area were slaughtered and the stone destroyed. The Empire ended up paying a weregild of two hundred thrones for the slain orcs, but at the time the Jotun rebuffed any suggestion that the stone might be replaced.

Creating a new meeting place would help to create the conditions that make peace possible. It would give the Empire a reliable place to meet with the Jotun, which would avoid them having to traipse all the way to Anvil, something Naomi suspects they resent. The ideal location would be near the Jotun

border, which is obviously challenging given the way it can quickly move.

Establishing a meeting place would require effective diplomacy with the Jotun. The Empire can't just build something and present it as a done deal, and expect the Jotun to be impressed. The Empire would need to overcome the Jotun's current resistance to the idea of a new meeting place and get them to support the idea.

The Empire would need to commission a suitable structure and finance it. The Jotun will not contribute to the cost - since the Empire destroyed the last one, they will regard it as the Empire's responsibility to replace it. A new meeting place could be a simple monument, a menhir or stone needing as little as three wains of white granite, but the large and more impressive the structure, the more impact it will have. Naomi recommends building a feasting hall, given how much the Jotun enjoy feasts. If the Empire constructs a feasting hall and invites the Jotun to use it, then they are unlikely to be able to resist.

If the Empire successfully creates a new meeting place that is accepted by the Jotun, then they will be more likely to negotiate for peace.

Respect the Legends

- The Jotun place great store in legends and sagas of epic deeds they call gests
- If the Empire can arrange matters in ways that mimic Jotun legends and sagas then it will make it easier to seal an agreement with the Jotun

Like many people, the Jotun have a strong story-telling culture and they place great store in symbols, legends and sagas. Some of their ghodi learn to perform dramatic gests - epic tales of

adventures of Jotun heroes of old. The Jotun believe that these performances attract the attention of those who have gone over the Howling Abyss before them, effectively a way of honouring the gods and ancestors, inviting them to take part in celebrations.

Crucially, when events unfold in ways that appear to echo honourable events of the past, the Jotun consider them to be auspicious. There is a widespread belief that if something follows the path of a previous gest, then future events are more likely to follow the saga. For this reason, highly symbolic gestures are often an important part of diplomatic exchanges with the Jotun. The more the Empire can arrange matters to appear like past diplomatic events between them, then the more positive the Jotun will be.

The Jotun are not simpletons - they won't agree a peace treaty simply because the Empire engineers some pivotal scene of yesteryear in which an important treaty was signed. But if the conditions are right, then they will inevitably be moved to "follow the gest", to act in accordance with the story. Some particularly superstitious Jotun are said to be suspicious of any important event that doesn't appear to copy the shape and form of important events of old. Items of worth can be particularly important for these recreations, their presence emphasizing the connection to the past. Such arrangements are common between Jotun jarls - deliberately trying to arrange matters to reflect details of past events is not considered duplicitous or manipulative, rather it is seen as a way to honour the gods while trying to negotiate honestly and openly.

Naomi gives an example of how this might work. Emperor Guntherm forged an alliance with the Jotun by saving the life of the Jarl of Keirheim when the pair were attacked by a force of Thule. So if the current Jarl of Keirheim were saved by the

current Emperor, then the Jarl would undoubtedly be aware of the history of such an act and of the significance of it and what it portended. By itself, it wouldn't mean anything, but if it happened at a point where relations between the Empire and the Jotun were improving then it would make it easier for the Empire to agree an alliance with the Jotun, because that is what happened last time.

These recreations may be symbolic in nature, they don't have to be literal - for instance if a prominent Imperial citizen saved the life of an important Jarl it would resonate with the original story of Guntherm. The closer in status and comportment that the individuals were to figures in the original story, the stronger the resonance would be.

Identifying the right Jotun story to emulate may be difficult enough by itself, never mind finding objects of worth important to that story or the right people to re-enact the roles. But if the Empire can find a way to arrange negotiations so that they recreate events from an important Jotun gest, then it will make it easier to seal an agreement with the Jotun.

Resolve The Navarr Issue

- The Jotun nurse a bitter hate for the Navarr who they consider to be little better than crazed beasts
- Improving the Jotun's view of the Navarr would make it easier to negotiate peace
- Alternatively, minimising all military contact between the Navarr and the Jotun would make peace easier in the future
- It would also be important to prevent any new issues arising, especially with the Varushkans

The Jotun loathe the Navarr - they refer to them as "human

Druj" and consider them to be crazed beasts that need to be put down. They don't like the Varushkans very much either - they are all too familiar with the work of the Iron Helms torturing and executing their enemy - but they hate the Navarr with a passion.

It's not entirely clear how this affects the Empire's ability to make peace with the Jotun. The Jotun seem to regard the Navarr as something akin to the Iron Helm's war dogs, violent, barely-controlled savage animals, that the Empire lets off the leash during war. It is likely that in any negotiation for terms for war, the Jotun would seek to include restrictions on how the Empire could deploy the Navarr armies.

It might be possible to change the Jotun's perception of the Navarr. While that would seem difficult, the Wintermark have managed it, and so have the Brass Coast. The Empire could invest considerable time into finding diplomatic solutions to make the Jotun stop hating the Navarr. If they were successful in doing so it would make it much easier for the Empire to negotiate peace with the Jotun. They still wouldn't like the Varushkans much, but they are on the other side of the Empire and thus less of an issue.

Finding a way to improve the Jotun's view of the Navarr might be challenging, and almost certainly impossible if the Navarr have no interest in such endeavours. A simpler alternative would be to ensure that the Navarr never fight on campaign against the Jotun. The less interaction the Jotun have with the Navarr, the less offended they will be by their very existence. However any plan to ensure the Navarr don't fight the Jotun will likely be fraught with difficulty if the war moves to Liathaven.

A Moment in Time

- These proposals are all valid at the Autumn Equinox 386YE; as time passes they may become less relevant

Naomi has prepared a list of actions she thinks will help to create conditions that make peace, albeit temporary, possible.

As time passes, the situation will inevitably change and some or all of these suggestions may lose their relevance. This is true of any appraisal, but especially true where diplomacy with another nation is concerned.

Lasambria

- The Lasambrians fight alongside the Jotun but retain their own independence and are actively seeking a peace treaty with the Empire
- Previous overtures from the Lasambrians have been rejected, this approach represents the final chance to negotiate with them independently of the Jotun

The Lasambrian Orcs have a relationship with the Empire that is every bit as complicated and tortuous as the Jotun. They lay claim to parts of Reinos, Kalino, Segura and Kahraman but they have also attacked Feroz in the past. Their small nation was ultimately conquered when the Jotun allied with the Iron Confederacy and the two groups attacked together. The assaults forced the Lasambrians to split, with a third of them taking refuge in the Empire, a third bending the knee to the Jotun, and a third fleeing to the Broken Shore with the help of the Grendel.

The Empire taught the Virtues to those Lasambrians who had taken refuge in the Brass Coast. The Lasambrians were cynical at first, but eventually they eagerly embraced, not the Way exactly, but the Virtues. Sadly this conversion did not lead to a

closer alliance with the Empire. Exact events appear unclear, but it seems that the voices in the Senate or on the Military Council intended to wipe them out, but they were tipped off and fled west to join their siblings who were by then fighting for the Jotun, before the fateful blow could fall.

As part of her efforts to appraise peace with the Jotun, Naomi of Virtue's Rest and her assistants met with the Lasambrians near the banks of the Scorrero River, at the point where the borders of Kahraman, Segura and Reinos meet. A small camp awaited them, a flag of truce fluttering next to the orange banners of the septs of Lasambria. While members of all three septs were present, Naomi reports that three primary diplomats took the lead: Juevar Hand-Joiner, Lucero Mithril-Shield, and Esperanza Blade-Binder, all three being part of the Hierro. These orcs have engaged in diplomacy with the Empire, either currently or in previous years, and all three are settled in for a long conversation. No representatives of Narkyst or Kalsea were present.

Most orcs who are conquered by the Jotun either become thralls or become Jotun themselves. Perhaps that will happen in time, but for the moment, their embrace of the Virtues has helped to keep the Lasambrians somewhat distinct from the other Jotun. They fight alongside the Jotun, but they pursue their own objectives and goals. They are less eager for war - but they are filled with Ambition, Pride and Courage, and prepared to do anything to recover their lands. That includes trying to negotiate their own peace treaty with the Empire.

The Lasambrians may have sworn themselves to the Jotun, but they have none of the thirst for battle that characterises their northern counterparts. They seem to accept that Virtue may be exercised in peacetime as much as in war, and it is this that will preserve their souls in death and build their nation in life. They

do not especially want war with the Empire, regardless of their actions in recent years. They do, however, want things that so far have only seemed possible through war. There is optimism among the orcs present; if the Empire is willing to negotiate, then perhaps no more lives need be wasted. However, they are also cautious. While individuals within the Empire seem keen, so far there has been absolutely no indication that the Empire as a whole has the same enthusiasm. As such, if no agreements can be reached this season, the Lasambrians will have to show Courage and acknowledge the unwelcome truth that they simply do not have the strength to achieve their goals on their own. Any future negotiations would have to be done with them as part of the whole Jotun, rather than independently.

There are two offers on the table.

The Little Sibling

- The Lasambrians offer a limited ceasefire if the Empire will cede them the regions of Gambit and Serra Damata
- In exchange, no Jotun army will enter any region controlled by the Freeborn for a period of two years

The first is an offer of limited ceasefire, what the negotiators refer to as the 'Little Sibling Deal'. While an actual treaty will need to be drafted, and presented to the Senate by the Imperial Consul, the actual details are quite simple. The Empire will cede to the Lasambrians - specifically the Lasambrians, rather than the Jotun more broadly - the regions of Gambit and Serra Damata in Kahraman. The Empire will also commit to send no Imperial armies into either the ceded regions or into the territory of Reinos for a period of two years. In exchange for this, no Jotun army will enter any territory controlled by the Freeborn for a period of two years. This

would not only include Kahraman and Segura, but any other territory that is conquered by or assigned to the Freeborn within the period of the ceasefire.

This offer would include all armies of the Jotun, not just the Lasambrians. Follow-up questions clarify that while the armies of the Jotun may travel through the Lasambrian-controlled regions of Kahraman during this time, they will not cross the borders into Imperial-controlled territory. Of course, Serra Damata includes two Bourse resources, the Imperial seat of the Damatian Cliffs and the Freeborn National seat of the Red Depths, both of which would go to the Lasambrians when the regions were ceded.

It would be challenging to enact such a treaty without the support of the Freeborn themselves; any Senate motion that cedes a region or territory of a nation is subject to a veto by the General Assembly or the national assembly of the nation relinquishing land.

The Big Sibling

- The Lasambrians will secede from the Jotun and establish themselves a neutral, independent nation if the Empire "honours the historical claims of the Lasambrians"

The second avenue of conversation, Naomi reports, was somewhat deeper and more unexpected. The Lasambrians and the Jotun of Kalsea and Narkyst have been in discussions between them for some time and have a bold proposal, one raised with certain dignitaries of Anvil last season. The Lasambrians are prepared to secede from their northern kin and establish themselves as an independent nation, neutral in the wars between the Empire and the Jotun, treating and trading with both - something they refer to as the 'Big Sibling Deal'. The Jotun are prepared to support such a desire, but only if a

suitable arrangement can be made with the Empire that 'honours the historical claims of their Lasambrian siblings'. Exactly what this means is, apparently, up for discussion, although those who were present at the negotiations last season might have a better idea.

The Lasambrian Delegation

- A diplomatic delegation from the Lasambrian Hills is once again on its way to Anvil
- The orcs are Lasambrian Jotun, barbarians, and thus fall within the purview of the Imperial Consul
- They are expected to arrive at Anvil at 13:00 in the afternoon on Saturday

Regardless of all this, the Lasambrians have a suggestion for the Empire. The three negotiators from last season - Esperanza Blade-Binder of the Hierro, Reyes Aguila of the Corazon, and Pastor Imanol of the Escuta - will be attending Anvil this coming season. Imanol, a noted scholar of the Virtues, wishes to discuss matters of faith with Imperial priests, and is especially interested in examining items or people that have manifested spontaneous auras of Virtue. Reyes is keen to swap tales of excitement and heroism, particularly with the bold Corsairs of the Brass Coast, and to discuss avenues for future adventure if peace is finally established.

Esperanza, meanwhile, is keen to hear suggestions from the diplomats of the Empire. Last season, the Lasambrians proposed a treaty. It was made clear that the terms were not acceptable to the Empire. As such, she suggests that the Golden Jarl, the Imperial Consul, and any other interested parties, present a draft of a treaty that the Empire might be willing to accept. Should it prove acceptable to her own leaders back

home, it could be acted on by all parties as soon as next season. The Lasambrians are willing to hear out all possible proposals, and they urge the diplomats of the Empire to get creative. The more the deal benefits both parties, the more it is likely to succeed.

The diplomatic party have travelled with Naomi and her entourage on the path to Casinea, before splitting off with a small group of escorts to head to Anvil. They intend to arrive in Anvil at 13:00 on Saturday of the forthcoming summit. They also pass on a request that the negotiations take place in the Freeborn camp if at all possible - it would only be polite to make sure that as many Freeborn voices as possible could be heard in a matter that concerns them so greatly.

A Sting In The Tail

- The Jotun will try to use any peace deal to either prepare for a future war with the Empire or attack the Faraden

The last time the Jotun came to the Empire with an offer of peace, they used the time to wage a war of conquest against their immediate neighbours. The Faraden held them off for as long as possible, but they were forced to surrender lands, wealth and people to the Jotun. On previous occasions when the Empire has been at peace with the Jotun, they have used that time to build up their forces for the next war.

One or both of these outcomes is likely if the Empire finds a way to make peace with the Jotun. Their religious beliefs compel them to war, either to be waging war or to be preparing for it. If the Empire are able to hand them a crushing defeat, then it may take years for them to build their forces back up, and they will likely be quiescent during that period. But if the Empire is forced to agree a peace deal while the Jotun are still

in a strong position, then they will inevitably march their armies south into Faraden.

Participation: War Stories

- Many of the events discussed here happened during the Empire campaign

All the events discussed in the A short history of war and Fighting with Honour, as well as many others touched on in the Fighting for Peace and Lasambria sections, happened since the Empire campaign began running. Though some of the characters involved will have died or retired many of them are still active on the field.

Now is a perfect time to take out some of the stories about events in the distant days a decade ago, and share them with people who may not have heard them. It presents an opportunity to recount things your character, or characters who have since died, did in the war (and peace) with the Jotun, and can serve as a reminder that the current state of affairs with the Jotun is rooted as much in your actions as in the histories created before the game began.

It's also entirely appropriate for anyone who was active during the period following the death of Empress Britta to roleplay that they have spoken with Naomi or one of her assistants, sharing their own opinions on these events.

***From the travel journal of Sarah Fisher of Stockland,
Assistant to Naomi of Virtue's Rest***

It is the third day of travelling with my Lasambrian companions, and I believe that I am finally coming to understand more about them as people. While one may learn a

lot about someone across the negotiating table, I find that an evening around the campfire can show more of a person's true character to the Vigilant observer. I talk, I listen, and as I learn about the three orcs who travel with me, I believe that I learn more about their septs.

Pastor Imanol of the Escuta is the most spiritual of the three. While all of my companions show a clear understanding of and regard for the Virtues, Pastor Imanol is always keen to talk to me on matters of faith whenever the pair of us are free. He tells me that his title is derived from an old Lasambrian term for shepherd, but he speaks more of protecting those who depend on him than of carefully guiding them to the truth. The sheep of the Lasambrian hills are, it seems, hardier and more intelligent than the slow, easily-spooked lowland breeds whose wool is so comfortable. He is quick to question the authority of the Synod even within the Empire, and has several times claimed the 'true Lasambrians' are independently-minded and dislike being told what to do. I sense some annoyance from his companions when he says such things - I believe that they dislike being lectured on Lasambrian culture by one who rediscovered his heritage less than a decade ago!

When things get tense, Reyes Aguila of the Corazon is often the one to defuse the situation. I simply need to give the slightest hint that I wish to hear a story of perilous adventure and I am immediately obliged. Their stories are often laced with humour as well, as often directed at themselves as not. Reyes is quick to laugh and slow to take offence, yet I sense something deeper behind that easy smile. They may joke about their life as a bandit before they found the Virtues, but I believe that they struggle to reconcile the person they once were with the person they wish to be. Nonetheless, their determination to find joy in every moment is almost Freeborn in its intensity, even if it does sometimes infuriate their more reserved companions.

Lastly comes Esperanza Blade-Binder, with whom I have spent so many hours negotiating. Sometimes one can recognise a kindred spirit across all bonds of species and nation, and in Esperanza I see someone whose dedication to her people's interests matches my own. She is full of drive and sincerity and does not seem afraid to show vulnerability if she thinks that it will get her what she wants. Who knows, had things turned out differently I might have tried to recruit her to assist me in my duties. Yet I must remain Vigilant, for her Ambition burns brightly. She often tries to draw me out on the state of the Empire, our wars, our economic situation, our internal divides and alliances. She does not wish to do wrong by us, and I am sure that she would nonetheless do so in a heartbeat if it was truly to her people's advantage. Her companions are my best allies in distracting her, as she has a habit of treating them like misbehaving children.

What have I learned from all of this? I will have to sleep on it. Perhaps it is just that these orcs who we fought for so long are a lot like us. Spiritual in a way reminiscent of the Highborn, as fun-loving and daring as the Freeborn, as keen for adventure as the Dawnish, and as prone to arguing as a family of Marchers. Hopefully, in time we will be able to call them friends again. And if we cannot, hopefully we can at least be Virtuous rivals.