

Where five winds meet

As the temple hove into sight, all Sembaguun's worries came surging back to the fore. She'd had reservations from the start, and the brief visit to the great burial mound that had apparently once been a fortress had crystallized them a little. These people were warlike, unforgiving, quick to anger, dangerous. Her uncle Tjina had told her horror stories as a child - of how they had no understanding of Justice and so were ultimately unpredictable, untrustworthy creatures of chaos.

As she grew older, as she experienced the wider world, Sembaguun had learned to see her uncle for the frightened, small-minded man he had always been. But his stories stuck with her, and during this trip she had seen time and again how Imperials could be incredibly rude without seemingly realising it, or taking offence at the slightest thing. The story of Fort Braydon had given her nightmares - of a performance that ended with war and the complete destruction of her family home by raging, implacable Imperial warriors who then went on to rampage through the Court of the Five Winds.

She tried to express some of her anxiety to Maadjuni, who listened attentively and nodded along a little.

"It's good to be nervous," she said when Sembaguun had finished unburdening herself. "These people are chaotic and undisciplined. They do have no understanding of Justice. But! There's more to them than that. They're unruly, but I've never met another people so enthusiastic about music you can dance to. Or music you can sing along with. Or music that moves you."

"But still..." Sembaguun was not convinced. "This is a temple we are going to Maadjuni. You said it yourself. There

will be priests there, and they will try to convert us and make us afraid of our neighbours, or tell us we should abandon the bonds of family in pursuit of selfishness, or... or... I don't know whatever it is that they think is wise."

Maadjuni laid a hand on her companion's arm to stop her, and took hold of both her shoulders.

"Sembaguun, trust me," she said emphatically, staring into the other woman's eyes. "When have I ever steered you wrong? We are going to a place run by sutannir and they are not the Imperial priests you have nightmares about. Nothing like them. They love music and passion just as much as we do, from a people that loves such things. I heard tell the Brass Coast was founded by three proud women who chose to flee from a place that tried to crush their spirits and force them to wear shrouds, and that they flew across the ocean as burning falcons to create a new country where people could be free to sing and dance. We shouldn't fear such people, not unless they give us good reason to. Be brave, most beloved. When you sing, and when I play, they will listen, and they will enjoy it, and then we will listen to their songs and enjoy them, and we will take some of that joy back with us, and play those new songs."

She smiled at Sembaguun then.

"And I know at least three houses who will pay us a lot of money to hear the music of the Empire. And you know how much I like money!"

Sembaguun laughed, just a little unsteadily, and took a deep breath. After another few moments, she nodded, and they broke apart. While her doubts were not entirely assuaged, her worries no longer threatened to overwhelm her.

"That said..." said Maadjuni after several minutes of rumination. "It might be a good idea to avoid singing any of the

songs that touch on Jian or the Flames of the Sun. It turns out that even the happy-go-lucky Freeborn have strong views on the virtue of setting half your family on fire. But otherwise I'm sure it will be fine!"

Overview

Faraden is a country of canny merchants and wizards, proud warriors and heretical priests. The lifeblood of their nation is trade, however, with anyone who will accept their caravans, who almost follow the Way but not quite. They have no shared border with the Empire – the lands of the Jotun lie between them – and their people are known to view the sea with a kind of superstitious dread that has prevented them from engaging in much maritime trade – a major disadvantage for a nation such as theirs. Relations between the Empire and Faraden vary from year to year, warm one moment, cool the next, but it has never come to open warfare.

The Faraden ambassador to the Empire is Mistress Singua Karadragha, a relatively recent appointment who replaced the former incumbent Lady Saretta of the Red Moon at the insistence of the Liege of the Five Winds, following their assumption of the position in a (relatively) bloodless coup. Mistress Singua advises the Court of the Five Winds on all diplomatic matters, and speaks on their behalf to foreign ambassadors. Her attitude to the Empire appears to be cool but professional, and heavily informed by the wishes of the Liege and their court, who seek more opportunities to trade with the Empire.

Faraden

- Status: Foreigner

- Ports: Caitun
- Ambassador: Ebenezer of the Marches

The Warship in the Room

- The recent Asavean attack on Meade originated in Faraden waters
- The Ambassador is responsible for talking to Faraden about their involvement in the attack

Following the Summer Solstice, a trio of Asavean warships launched a surprise attack against the city of Meade in the Marches. The attack was repulsed, thanks to the timely warning provided by orders captured in battle by Imperial heroes. The Drakes, and a number of independent captains sank one of the attacking ships, and significantly damaged another.

It's clear though that the warships came down the Gullet and into the Westmere from Faraden lands, and it's an open secret that the Asaveans are attempting to gain a political foothold there. They have been wooing a number of anti-Imperial factions in the Court of the Five Winds, most notably the family of High Lady Togene Altsanig of Tujahan

If the situation were reversed, it is certain that Mistress Kadragha would be expressing the outrage of the Court of Five Winds and demanding apologies and reparations. The Ambassador represents the Empire, so it is up to them to respond to this delicate situation. No Faraden took part in the raid on Meade; their action may have been supported by High Lady Togene and her peers, but the Asaveans acted alone.

The Ambassador could certainly demand reparations, or call for punitive action, but may need to choose their words carefully.

For centuries the Imperial Synod and the priests of Faraden have been in conflict over the nature of the malign spiritual presence of Vengeance - what the Faraden call Justice. Too impassioned a response from the Empire might risk undermining the claim that the Empire denies Vengeance.

On the other hand, ignoring the involvement of Faraden citizens in the attack will appear weak. At the very least citizens of Menendram will be aware that the warships gathered in Faraden waters before they launched their assault. Ignoring the matter risks lending credence to claims that Faraden would be better off siding with Asavea. If the Empire will not protect its own territory from Asavean raids, they would certainly not side with Faraden if the Liege of the Five Winds were to disavow Asavea.

A fine line for the Ambassador to walk indeed.

The Asavean Problem

- Asavean agents are active in Faraden

The Liege of Five Winds gained their position largely on the understanding that they would secure the prosperity of the nation. They sought closer ties with the Empire, but their motivation grounded in economic considerations rather than any particular affection for Imperial citizens – trade with their largest neighbour represents the greatest opportunity for prosperity.

However, the Asaveans are also a large and powerful nation, even if they are far away to the west. They have intervened militarily to aid to the Grendel, and now the effects of their diplomatic efforts can be seen in Faraden. Nobles from several families question whether the nation might not be better off allying with Asavea than continuing an arm's-reach relationship

with the Empire. A larger, and currently more credible, voice suggests that despite all their aspirations and their Pride, Faraden cannot afford to take sides in a fight between powers such as Asavea and the Empire. They cannot afford to make enemies of Asavea, because on their own they will ultimately be defeated – or worse.

Gather Information Roles

- The Shattered Lantern or the Celestial Arch could become involved in Faraden
- The master of the Regario Dossier might also become involved

As with the recent worrying developments in Axos, part of the problem is the Empire's limited intelligence on what is actually going on in Faraden. As with their eastern neighbours, there were ways to learn more about the Asavean threat. In the wake of the attack on Meade, there is sufficient interest in the situation in Faraden that the magicians of two Conclave orders may offer assistance in investigating the situation.

The Shattered Lantern excel at gathering information through magical means. As well as directly investigating, they make good use of divination magic to wheedle out secrets and uncover evidence of wrongdoing. The Grandmaster could use a declaration of Concord to commit their order to an investigation of Asavean activity in Faraden. They would prepare a report, or provide opportunities, relating to Asavean espionage and skullduggery at the Winter Solstice.

Alternatively, the Celestial Arch could use the ties they have cultivated with the Tchemetzi family to investigate the matter with particular reference to the nations wizards. The 'Arch has

different areas of expertise to the 'Lantern, and any report or opportunity they present would be more focused around the attitudes and involvement of Faraden nobility than the Asavean interlopers.

As with all such efforts to guide an order, the declaration would need to be made by the order itself, and be supported by the Imperial Conclave, with a cost of 20 mana drawn from the font. Any report made by an order would eventually become a matter of public knowledge for any Imperial citizen who cared to learn more.

One order operating alone will not attract much attention. If the Conclave were to send both orders, then while their approaches could be complementary, focusing on different aspects of the situation, the sudden influx of Imperial wizards would make the Faraden aware that something is going on, and would also mean the Asaveans became aware that the Empire was actively seeking out their involvement in the smaller nation.

There is also an opportunity for the Master of the Regario Dossier to use their assets in Faraden to investigate the situation. They could instruct civil servants to have Agent Alephan and their network investigate this situation. Based at the Court of the Five Winds in Faraden, Agent Alephan is in a position to assess Asavean involvement in the nation and deliver a private report to the holder of the dossier. Doing so would be risky – the Regario Dossier agents would be up against agents not only of the Faraden but also the wily agents of the Asavean Republic. An additional cost of 11 Thrones would be incurred for this activity, and would need to be paid by the holder of the Regario Dossier, who is currently Laszlo Gulyas von Temeschwar, of the Guild of Drovers. They would deliver a concise report at the Winter Solstice, identifying some of the major players in both Faraden and Asavea. Their report

would not automatically become public knowledge.

The risk is that the Asaveans are very old hands at international diplomacy and espionage. The civil service prognosticate that it would be impossible for Agent Alephan to avoid attracting at least some attention from Asavean agents at large in Faraden. While they wouldn't automatically identify Alephan or their network, they would know the Empire was actively pursuing mundane espionage in the nation.

(OOO Note: If the master of the Regario Dossier wishes to take advantage of this opportunity, they would need to ensure the 11 Thrones are in their inventory and e-mail plot after the event before the close of downtime to let them know they are asking Agent Alephan to put together an emergency report).

Limitations

The opportunities for the Shattered Lantern, Celestial Arch, and Master of the Regario Dossier, all arise from collective outrage around the recent attack on Meade. As a consequence, they are only available during the Autumn Equinox.

Too High a Price

- The price to purchase Imperial wains is judged too high by Faraden merchants
- Ambassador Ebenezer expresses concerns about the value of the Gloaming Road

During the Summer Solstice, Mistress Karadragha responded to inquiries about the possibility of selling Imperial wains in Faraden. To the surprise of nobody, least of all the Faraden, Ambassador Ebenezer regretfully rejected the resulting offers as being far too low. Their counteroffer - 36 crowns per wain

of weirwood, the same for white granite or mithril – has been presented to the Court of the Five Winds by Mistress Karadragha, but she expects little to come of it. At easily twice the opening offer from the Faraden merchants, it is clear that Imperial wains are simply too expensive at this time. A wonder, she remarks drily, that the ambassador considers the Gloaming Road to be such a poor proposition, although she notes that there are clearly Imperial citizens who take a slightly different view of the profitability of trade with Faraden.

Ambassador Ebenezer has expressed concerns that “due to hostile forces” the route into the Brass Coast via the Lasambrian hills is no longer profitable., and shared fears that “the position won't be continued after the current incumbent.” They invited the Faraden to consider whether there might be a way to make the route more lucrative, to off-set the maintenance costs.

The merchants involved, after some discussion, have declined to change their prices. Even though demand has declined, they are still securing significant amounts of the valuable iridescent gloaming in return for their mithril, and even with the steep tariffs charged by the Jotun the route remains profitable for them. Reading between the lines, they are waiting to see if the Ambassador is correct, and nobody in the Empire wishes to trade gloaming for mithril via the Gloaming Road.

Speaking somewhat informally, however, Singua makes reference to the fact it would be much cheaper to transport the mithril to a port such as Caitun and sell it to Imperial merchants there instead of trekking a caravan through Jotun lands. Unfortunately, she concludes, “some merchant families are very traditional, and view anything to do with sea trade with great suspicion.” Whatever happens with the Gloaming Road she doubts it will have any lasting diplomatic repercussions, given

how more profitable the mithril market at Caitun is in comparison. Mistress Karadragha will observe developments with interest.

High Lord of the Rain

- The Tchemetzi family are still keen to purchase Imperial weirwood
- They have raised their offer but it still falls short of the Ambassador' benchmark
- They have proposed an alternative trade involving a ritual text

Particularly interested in purchasing materials from the Empire was High Lord Mukhali Tchemetzi of Menendram, and patriarch of the Imperial-inclined Tchemetzi family. They were interested in acquiring 25 wains of weirwood to improve farms across their territory, but only able to offer 50 Thrones for the valuable wains. Mistress Singua has informed the High Lord of the Ambassador's counteroffer – that the purchase price for Imperial wains would be 36 crowns each – and after some discussion Mukhali is prepared to go as high as 78 Thrones but cannot exceed that amount at this time. They are also prepared to collect the wains from the Empire, and transport them back to Pelabuhan. Indeed, High Lord Tchemetzi's daughter Malune Tchemetzi has pledged to travel by sea to get the wains and arrange their delivery to Faraden, something that has caused more than a little scandal among more traditional nobles.

High Lord Tchemetzi clearly does not expect Imperial merchants to be able to fill his requirements at the price he offers. After extensive discussion with members of his family, and consultation with their eternal patron, Mukhali has a third offer. The Tchemetzi will provide the Imperial citizen who

delivers the wains they want with a copy of one of their prized ritual texts. Faraden wizard families hoard their magical knowledge closely, and it speaks to the importance of the trade that High Lord Tchemetzi is prepared to countenance it.

There are three rituals that the Tchemetzi are prepared to provide, each part of the lore of Spring magic: Golden Wellspring A ritual that provides ambergelt to Lord Rain in return for warm honey; Waters of Bounteous Prosperity A ritual that uses the power of Lord Rain to enchant a farm so that it produces 10 measures of herbs in addition to its normal production; or Streams of Verdancy A ritual that enchants a herb garden with the assistance of Lord Rain so that it provides an additional 10 drams of both true vervain and bladeroot in the coming season. Each ritual has an assurance, but from his discussions with the Celestial Arch, High Lord Mukhali believes the Empire will find it easy to avoid breaking them. The Tchemetzi are currently hoping to trade one ritual text for the 25 wains they want; this might prove very optimistic.

On a personal note, Mistress Karadragha passes on High Lord Mukhali's thanks to the Ambassador for their generous offer – to bring Marcher landskeepers to Pelabuhan to help enchant their farms. There is no need for them to do so however. The Tchimetzi are Proud wizards, more than capable of weaving potent enchantments where needed, and indeed their proficiency is the cornerstone of their Prosperity. One reason they are seeking weirwood is that they have reached the effective pinnacle of what they can achieve solely with magic and are looking to increase their wealth further by enhancing the underlying farms. Regardless, the Tchimetzi absolutely appreciate the offer, and Mukhali says it speaks well of the Ambassador that they made it.

OOO Note: Any Imperial citizen who wishes to take advantage

of either offer can do so by ensuring the wains are in their inventory, and then emailing plot indicating they wish to make the trade. They should be clear which offer they wish to accept - the 75 Thrones offer or the ritual text offer. In the latter case they should specify which ritual text they want.

Butterflies and Boxes

- The Blue Silk Scarf guild is still eager to secure iridescent gloaming
- They have made arrangements with the City of Gold and Lead to try and secure Imperial gloaming during the coming summit

The artisans of the Blue Silken Scarf are pleased to receive a shipment of iridescent gloaming from the Ambassador. A guild of tailors, dressmakers, and silk-weaving wizards, they are particularly interested in securing large amounts of iridescent gloaming, and even though the Gloaming blight is no longer an issue it can be challenging to acquire the material in Faraden.

However, even with Ambassador Ebenezer's shipment they are still short of the amount they need for the coming year – they still want a further 100 iridescent gloaming. After a lengthy discussion with Mistress Kharadragha, they are prepared to go as high as 18 rings a measure, or two crystal mana per five measures.

As wizards themselves, however, they are well aware that transporting measures overland is not the only way to do business. During the Autumn Equinox they have secured an arrangement with the Silent Market, a faction of traders in the City of Gold and Lead. If the Ephesis' Scale ritual is performed during the summit and the box contains only iridescent gloaming and a single piece of paper

with a butterfly or moth drawn on it, they have instructed the brokers to secure the gloaming on their behalf.

Should they be successful at reaching their goal of 100 iridescent gloaming during the Equinox, it will demonstrate that they can do business with the Empire.

On an unrelated, and slightly more personal note, the Mistress of the Blue Silken Scarf asks if Ambassador Ebenezer might make inquiries on her behalf as to whether the Mirrored Maschieri specifically would be interested in either purchasing enchanted Faraden clothing, or perhaps endorsing or somehow encouraging interest in Faraden fashion? What kind of arrangement might be needed to secure such a thing?

Music and Laughter

- In thanks for their rescue, Erdene Bataguin has spread news of the Azure Chorus and its fine musical venue to Faraden performers
- The Azure Sutannir receives a small amount of additional money while relations between the two nations remain good
- If the Freeborn assembly supports the Faraden visitors, Erdene will design and oversee an expansion for the Azure Chorus
- The Azure Sutannir is currently Mina i Yashum i Riqueza

With the Lasambrian Jotun invasion of Kahraman ending in defeat for the orcs of the western hills, work has been completed on the project to secure the roads of that territory from raiders. The project incorporated a number of Faraden kamkrags, with construction being assisted by members of the Bataguin family. When a respected member of the family was kidnapped, the Azure Sutannir Mina i Yashum i

Riqueza stepped up to ensure their release. The Bataguin are not immensely wealthy, but they are well respected in Faraden for their building prowess. Erdene Bataguin, the rescued architect, is particularly enthusiastic about singing the praises of the Azure Chorus, the beautiful temple in the foothills of the Gilded Peak.

One of the unexpected consequences of this has been an increase in Faraden visitors to the area. Not merchants - or not solely merchants - but musicians and other performers keen to explore the Brass Coast and the south-western Empire in general. Brightly coloured Faraden tents and marquees now join those of Imperial pilgrims, and there have been several well-attended performances in the natural amphitheatre below the temple. When it comes to matters of religion, out of deference to their hosts these western pilgrims avoid conflict. They enthusiastically participate in discussions about the things they have in common with the followers of the Way - their respect for Courage, Loyalty, Prosperity, and Pride - and avoid talking about the things that create division - Ambition, Wisdom, Vigilance, and of course Justice. Like any Imperial pilgrim, the Faraden pay their hosts for their hospitality. As such, as long as relations between the Empire and Faraden do not deteriorate significantly, the Azure Sutannir receives additional benefits from their sinecure, amounting to a further 2 crowns each season.

Erdene Bataguin however has a proposal of their own. They ask that the Freeborn National Assembly consider raising a statement of principle welcoming Faraden visitors to the Azure Chorus, encouraging pilgrims from both nations to come together in an appreciation of what connects them rather than what separates them, and asking the Azure Sutannir to include the protection of travellers from the west as part of their responsibilities. If such a statement receives a greater

majority, Erdene will work with the architects who designed the temple to design a beautiful parador to complement the temple, combining Faraden and Freeborn design. The structure will increase the benefits provided to the Azure Sutannir, giving them a small income of Faraden herbs and ingots of valuable metal. It will still need a Senate motion to allow the building to go ahead, and the Freeborn will need to source some of the materials themselves, but Erdene will oversee the project meaning it would not impede the Senate's precious commission opportunities.

Mistress Karadragha also points out that, as long as everyone engages in good faith, establishing a place for Imperial pilgrims to meet with Faraden artists and the occasional merchant, can only be good for relations between the two nations.

Distant Caravans

- Faraden is still keen to gain a trading enclave in the Empire and has expressed interest in Holberg
- There is interest in an Imperial trading enclave in Caitun
- Mistress Karadragha warns that an obstacle to closer trading ties is the threat of Asavean involvement

The Court of the Five Winds has been discussing the response to their inquiries about a replacement for Moonwater Hall. Ambassador Ebenezer has regretfully informed the Faraden that there is no appetite for a trading enclave at this time. Mistress Karadragha herself finds this unsurprising given what happened last time. However, in spite of the tariffs imposed by the Jotun, she is confident there is still appetite in Faraden for trade with the Empire.

The Liege of Five Winds has requested that she continue to

pursue the matter, and as such she asks if there might be a location where Faraden traders could congregate that would be less volatile? She has heard good things about the city of Holberg on the far side of the Empire, and is confident that Faraden traders can do business with the guilds of the greatest city in the world. With the grand highways of the Blood Red Roads at their disposal, a Faraden caravan entering the Empire in the west and travelling all the way to the eastern borders and back would certainly provide ample opportunities for trade with the League, the Marches, Wintermark, and Highguard along the way. Would the sophisticated citizens of the League be open to an enclave there? Perhaps their priests could be consulted on the matter?

Regardless, there is certainly interest in the idea of a Moonwater Exchange in Caitun. The Faraden traditionally view trade by sea to be fraught with danger due to the nature of the Sea of Snows. Mistress Karadragha candidly points out that once goods are paid for, what a cambion whale does to the ship carrying them is no concern of the vendor. However, at this time the establishment of a true trading enclave in Caitun is not something the Liege of the Five Winds can countenance without offering similar opportunities to the Asavean Plenum. There is a great deal of difference between being open for business and welcoming trading vessels, and establishing a trading enclave. There is significant concern that any such enclave would turn Caitun into a target for Asavean raids. One reason the Court of the Five Winds encouraged the expansion of the docks there was so that Imperial traders, and Asavean merchants docking in Ondersant could be kept separated. Even more Imperial ships, while profitable, would likely lead to further conflict between Imperial and Asavean ships in Faraden waters. Laid against that, if the Empire were to offer a trading enclave in Holberg, it would be much easier for Mistress Karadragha to

reciprocate with an offer of an Imperial trading enclave in Caitun provided everyone involved understood what that would mean.

Nobody wants to pay tariffs to the Jotun; but likewise nobody wants two great nations fighting each other in their streets.

A Delegation

- Mistress Singua Karadragha is open to the idea of a delegation to visit the Empire
- She requests an agenda for discussion, so she can determine who best to send
- If a delegation is sent to the Empire, a similar delegation will be sent to Asavea

Ambassador Ebenezer has invited his opposite number in Faraden to a meeting, either in Caitun or in some other location. After due consideration, Mistress Karadragha is prepared to send a small formal delegation to Anvil to meet the Ambassador. Singua cannot come herself, due to the pressure of her role, but will send trusted representatives empowered to discuss matters on behalf of the Court of the Five Winds. She requests that as prelude to such a meeting, the Ambassador provide her with a list of topics to be discussed so she can prepare her delegates appropriately.

However, if she does send a formal delegation to Anvil, she will also have to accede to Asavean requests that a formal delegation be sent to Nemoria, likewise empowered to discuss matters of diplomacy, commerce, and treaty. So far she has been able to delay requests for such a thing by pointing out that if she did so she would have to give in to Imperial entreaties for a formal meeting between nations.

The Civil Service caution that what Mistress Karadragha appears to be intimating is that if she sends a delegation to the Empire, then the Asaveans will gain an opportunity to increase their influence in Faraden. At the moment it is clear Singua is attempting to stay as neutral as possible between the two great nations, but once formal negotiations begin it will be challenging for Faraden to retain that neutrality. Especially if the outcome of Asavean negotiations is more favourable.