

Hyenas and herbs

Whistling cheerfully, Machiel kept his hands on the wheel and his eyes on the horizon. They were four days out from Padunk Landing, and making good time. If the winds stayed favourable, they might just make it in three. He was looking forward to it. He absently patted his pocket where he kept the little carved lion he had bought while they were in Sarvos. It had been enchanted by an Imperial priest, and even that casual reminder of its presence encouraged him to whistle louder and more inventively. He would present it to Minni as soon as they reached port; he was confident she would love it and while its magic lasted it would provide her all the encouragement she needed to create something-

A broad mitt cuffed him round the back of the head, and a gruff voice snarled at him to be quiet. Captain Pietr was chewing the ends of his thick black moustache, looking worriedly to starboard as he paced the deck.

"Those ships are still there," he growled. "Same ones we saw when we passed the straits. Same ones we saw on the way into the Bay."

Before Machiel could reply, a cry went up from the Crow-nest.

"Ships to port!"

Captain Pietr furrowed his thick brows and shouted back. "What!? The ships are to starboard! What have you been drinking, you idiot?"

"Aye captain," came the voice again. "And there's three more ships to port."

Pietr swore, convulsively and fluently in several languages.

"Trapped," he muttered to himself. "Like lambs before a pack of

wolves. *We'll have to try and outrun...*"

He was interrupted by a rumbling, bellowing noise that rolled across the waves and wrapped itself around the ship. It came again, and a third time, the questioning note of a hyena horn. Asking if they needed assistance.

Captain Pietr laughed, grabbed Machiel by the shoulder.

"Hard to port," he shouted, loud enough to deafen the younger man. "Hard to port and set the flags! There's few pirates stupid enough to hunt Sarcophan ships when we outnumber them! It'll slow us down but when the Hyena is offering to walk next to you, only a fool turns it down."

Overview

Each season the Civil Service prepares a summary of the Empire's relationship with the foreign nations, based on communications received from their ambassador, along with any useful intelligence gathered from other sources. While the Senate and the other houses of Imperial power may respond to these offers, it is important to note that it is the appropriate ambassador that the foreign power will expect to hear from. Their communication with the foreign power is the primary element that will determine the tenor of any response.

Among the six great powers, the bedelaar huisbaas merchant-princes of the Sarcophan Delves strive for neutrality. They are always keen to see Imperial merchants in their ports, and trade with the Empire enthusiastically in their turn. Their neutrality is precious - they refuse to pick a side between the nations that make up the Liberty Pact and the so-called Freedom Accord, even though they themselves keep no slaves and do not trade in mortal lives. Time and again it has been made clear that their primary goal is to ensure the ports of the world remain open to

their ships, and they have easy access to the markets that are the foundation of their wealth. They particularly value the free trade agreements that allow their merchants to buy and sell in the Empire without onerous tariffs.

The Sarcophan ambassador to the Empire is Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike, of the Tower of Crows. She reports to the beggar-landlords of Sarcophan, and is known to be a wily and subtle diplomat. No stranger to the murkier waters of espionage and intelligence-gathering, she constantly seeks opportunities to expand the influence of the Sarcophan mercantile Empire across the Known World. She has no particular loyalty to any one faction; her main concern appears to be the prosperity of the nation as a whole.

Currently the Ambassador to the Sarcophan Delves is Thanmir Hrafnar of Wintemark, but the title is up for reappointment at the Autumn Equinox.

In addition to the opportunities discussed here, there are two other situations the Sarcophan are interested in this season. You can read about their enclave in Sarvos at the Alvietti Estates in the Houses of Silence wind of fortune.

Sarcophan Delves

- Status: foreigner
- Ports: Sarcophan and Betovering
- Ambassador: Thanmir Hrafnar of Wintermark (incumbent)

The Price of Doing Business

- Fewer Sarcophan vessels are trading with Imperial ports due to the bounty placed on trade with the Empire by the Asavean plenum

- Imperial fleets have an advantage to trade with Sarcophan ports while the bounty continues

As a nation of merchants, the Sarcophan Delves are enthusiastic about trading with the Empire. Unfortunately, the bounty placed on all ships trading with the Empire by the Asavean Plenum has started to take its toll on the number of ships visiting from the Delves. While Sarcophan captains are no strangers to needing to outrun or outfight pirates and privateers, the new bounty has taken many by surprise. It seems that the Delves' vaunted neutrality is no shield against the depredations of those inspired to harry trade with the Empire. Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike has made the unhappiness of the Delves very clear to Asavean diplomats, but they report that their hands are tied. Given a choice between weakening the bounty placed on ships trading with the Empire, or inconveniencing the Sarcophan, the Plenum chooses the latter.

At the moment, the major routes to the empire - those maintained by the Kruidenkenner or the Vandersaar for example - are holding strong the need to take additional precautions threatens the stability of this trade. The Bedelaar Huisbaas are discussing what to do about the Asavean Plenum, but they are caught between two equally unpalatable options. Stop trading with the Empire until the current crisis blows over with a consequent lack of trust from the Liberty Pact, or take a stance against the Asaveans which will inevitably be perceived as taking sides against the Freedom Accord.

As mentioned last season, however, the reduction in Sarcophan ships making the trip to the Empire is not wholly a bad thing. Anyone trading with the Sarcophan Delves this season will see a small boost to their profits (gaining the equivalent of a single rank) thanks to increased demand and, consequently, profits.

Children of Wrecks

- The Sarcophan Delves are concerned about the Children of Wrecks
- They want to know what the Empire plans to do about them

There is some concern among Sarcophan merchants regarding the so-called Children of Wrecks. This idolatrous pack of pirates and privateers have been attacking ships across the Bay of Catazar. Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike has never made any secret of the fact the Sarcophan Delves have treaties with the Grendel, ensuring the safety of their ships. It's clear that these treaties mean nothing to the Children of Wrecks. 'Delves captains are no strangers to needing to defend their cargo from pirates, but the increased number of attacks on the Bay have meant they need to employ more marines and in some cases additional ships. Which means a reduction in profits. The 'Delves see the Children of Wrecks as a problem for the Empire to sort out, and are interested in hearing from the Ambassador what their plan is for dealing with the warlike faction.

Reading between the lines, the Sarcophan have also addressed this question to the Salt Lords; the 'Delves clearly consider the pirates on the Bay of Catazar to be both nations' problem .

Conflict Breeds Opportunities

- Following the advice of the Ambassador, factions in the 'Delves are keen to seek out prosperous markets for their wains

Last season, there was discussion of the Empire selling wains to the 'Delves. Ambassador Hrafnar has made it clear to Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike that the offer of two thrones a wain is just not going to work; the Delves would need to offer at least twice that

and potentially more. This news has caused some interest in the Delves - not in buying wains but in selling them. If a wain is expected to fetch four or more Thrones a wain, then the costs and risks of importing them to the Empire are certainly worth it. As such, Sarcophan merchants are interested to see what kinds of prices their mithril, weirwood, and white granite will fetch in Imperial markets.

Obviously those presenting these opportunities are feeling the pinch of the Asavean bounty, but rather than withdraw from trade with the Empire they seem prepared to increase their investment. The civil service believe it is possible - not certain but possible - that if Imperial trade were seen as significantly more valuable than that with the Asaveans by enough of the Bedelaar Huisbaas, it might sway their decision about how to deal with the bounty in the Empire's favour.

Concordium Stone

- The Vandesaar are prepared to offer more white granite at the Concordium Docks

The Vandesaar report that the Concordium Docks are doing very well, with the Custodian regularly purchasing all the white granite they can import. Using the Ambassador's words, and these sales, as evidence of significant demand they have negotiated an agreement to gain access to additional white granite. As such, the Custodian is now able to buy more white granite; another eight wains each season. The extra white granite is not a permanent commitment at the moment; the Vandesaar will assess Imperial demand and as long as it remains steady they will keep offering the additional white granite, and simply employ more independent contractors to protect their vessels against the various threats now implicit in trade with the Empire and through the Bay of Catazar.

Cargo for Cargo

Debruin Docks

Commission Type: Ministry amendment (Senate Motion)

Location: Cargo, Redoubt

Cost: 90 crowns in labour

Effect: Reopens the Pallas Docks as the Debruin docks, amending the Custodian of the Pallas docks as the Custodian of the Debruin docks

Special: Senate motion may amend the appointment method of the title at the same time

Weirwood

160 Crowns 5 wains of weirwood

305 Crowns 10 wains of weirwood

435 Crowns 15 wains of weirwood

- The Debruin family seek Imperial support to reopen the Pallas Docks in Cargo
- They intend to import weirwood, but investment by the House of the Bear in trade with the Empire might bring other opportunities

Bastien Debruin is not a Bedelaar Huisbaas; his cousin sits in the seat of the Bear during the Beggar's Feast. He does however head up a wealthy and well-respected mercenary company. Recently, his company came into possession of a sizable source of weirwood. They are interested in offering it to the Empire. In the past, the Gjullit family proposed repurposing the Pallas Docks in Cargo. Never one to throw things away, the Debruin have presented a similar proposal.

If the Imperial Senate is prepared to refit the Pallas Docks, then the Debruin can guarantee the delivery of up to 15 wains of weirwood for purchase each season. The civil service have

looked at the request and believe that they would require a senate motion and a commission to refit the docks, at a cost of 90 crowns – in essence they would be modifying the existing docks rather than making new ones. The work would take three months.

Bastien Debruin has one additional requirement; the docks be renamed as the Debruin docks and at least one statue of a bear be included in the redesign.

The same motion used to redesign the docks and change the name could be used to amend the details of the Prime Factor of the Pallas Docks, effecting the change to dealing with the Sarcophan house. They could also take this opportunity to change the appointment method of the title – either leaving it as an Imperial position appointed by the Auction of the Seats, or making it an Urizen national position appointed by Tally of the Votes.

The civil service believe that Bastien Debruin is using this offer to improve their political position in the Delves, and within the house of the Bear. There's no suggestion Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike thinks this is a problem the Empire needs to worry about. There is also some suggestion that securing a working relationship with the Debruin family, and by extension the House of the Bear, might provide other opportunities. There is a reason the Debruin are not worried about transporting valuable weirwood through the contested Bay of Catazar – the Bear are well known for their martial prowess. Having the Debruin family with a vested interest in Cargo and by extension the Bay of Catazar could open up other opportunities if the Ambassador can think of a way to broach the subject.

Hyenas Under Sail

- The House of the Hyena and their allies are interested in

opportunities on the Brass Coast

- They aren't prepared to commit to anything while the Children of Wrecks are still a significant threat

During the Spring Equinox, the Suranni Duke of Arbonne hosted a gathering to discuss matters relating to salvage in Iron Confederacy waters. In addition to Imperial citizens, participants from several foreign nations attended including two representatives of the Sarcophan Delves. Anders and Geert are apparently members of the House of the Hyena - the Sarcophan faction that deals extensively in metals both practical and precious. It seems that a Freeborn attendee - Damian I Martan I Erigo - hit it off with the Sarcophan and at the Summer Solstice approached them with some potential opportunities regarding the Brass Coast. Anders and Geert themselves are nowhere near influential enough to negotiate on behalf of the Delves, but passed Damian's letter on to those who can.

According to Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike, the House of the Hyena are very interested in the opportunity to invest in the Brass Coast. According to her formal communiques to the embassy, Damian's proposals included the possibility of establishing a "trade of metals both used in the artisanal trade as well as both ilium and mithril." With the prices of Imperial wains predicted to be higher than the Delves are prepared to pay, that still leaves the opportunity for the House of the Hyena, to explore Freeborn markets for their own metals. Bedelaar Huisbaas Alama Vanderkleij is one of the wealthiest people in Sarcophan, and for the last seven years has sat in the Seat of the Hyena during the Beggar's Banquet. She is very interested in selling mithril and artisan metals to Freeborn markets... but not until the immediate threat of the Children of Wrecks is addressed. Alama is not concerned about the pirate ships - their

presence would simply reflect the amount the Vanderkleij would need to spend on mercenaries or the amount of harbour protection she would require. She is much more concerned about the Spring magic favoured by the followers of High Priestess Shivaarn. Magical storms and floods are very difficult to prepare for and the losses they can inflict could prove extremely costly. Once the Empire can demonstrate that they can deal with the Children of Wrecks threat, however, she is very keen to establish a Sarcophan presence at either Calvos or Quzar.

The Hyena have also been speaking to other families, and it appears there is a great deal of interest in the potential offered by the ruins of Siroc. The city was burned by the Asaveans and their Grendel allies, and then drowned by the rising of the Scorrero river. The Vanderkleij have reached an agreement with several smaller families associated with the distastefully named House of the Maggot who are very excited by the possibility of an exclusive contract to salvage the ruins - and they would pay either the Imperial treasury or the Senator for Madruga quite well for the opportunity. But again, this opportunity is reliant on the Empire showing they can deal with the Children of Wrecks.

Regarding the Kruidenkenner

- The Ambassador has passed on a request from the Kruidenkenner Trademaster
- The Kruidenkenner have been considering the nature of their investment in the Empire

The Kruidenkenner are an association of skilled Sarcophan herbalists. They have extensive investments in the Empire – the Kruidenkenner Magazijn at Crown's Quay is the largest and

best known but they also maintain a warehouse in Mitwold, overseen by the Master of the Root and Stem. Kruidenkenner merchants regularly sell herbs to the Clearing House in Tassato, to the High Herbalist of Sybella in Bastion, and they've been increasingly making use of the Sarcophan mooring in Ivarsgard to trade with Varushkan herbalists.

Ambassador Hrafnar has raised with Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike the concerns of the current Kruidenkenner Trademaster, Bernardo Von Temeschwar, who believes the prices being charged by the Kruidenkenner for Sarcophan herbs are too high. They proposed that the price be lowered by three rings across the board. Annike reports that the association has carefully considered the matter, but regretfully declines the suggestion. They cite both the costs of protecting their ships in Imperial waters, and the fact that Imperial citizens are still buying their herbs at the current price. They also point out that their opportunities for profit are being artificially restricted by the prohibition against using their warehouses, or goods purchased in the Empire, to trade with nations the Senate is at war with. And then of course there is the matter of the Asavean bounty and the bloodthirsty pirates.

A spokesperson for the Kruidenkenner thanks the Ambassador and the Trademaster, however. The request has prompted the association to review their investments in the Empire, to see if there is anything that might be done to improve them (from the Sarcophan point of view). One general element the Kruidenkenner are keen that the Ambassador understand is that in addition to herbs, they are also capable of importing ready-brewed potions, especially medicines such as the essential healing philtres or the more specialised potions of the Master Medicinal. Without meaning any slight against Imperial apothecaries, if there is interest they would be prepared to draw up a proposal for an apothecary market in the

Empire provided the Ambassador provided them with the names of two or at most three coastal ports where such a thing might be appreciated. Alongside, of course, an idea of which potions the Empire would be interested in.

They also have two more specific proposals regarding their business in the Empire.

Flowers for Sybella

Kruidenkenner Purchase

7 Crowns	10 true vervain, 6 marrowort
17 Crowns	22 true vervain, 11 marrowort
35 Crowns	32 true vervain, 18 marrowort

- The Kruidenkenner propose changing the herbs they provide to the High Herbalist of Sybella
- The Ambassador could effect this change on behalf of the High Herbalist by asking the Kruidenkenner to make it

When the Senate allowed the Kruidenkenner to expand their warehouses at Crown's Quay allowed them greater opportunity to invest in trade with Imperial herbalists including the High Herbalist of Sybella. While demand for Sarcophan herbs began strong, it has declined sharply in recent seasons.

Some of the merchants who deal with the physician's hall have suggested that the High Herbalist's responsibility to secure herbs for the Anvil hospital may mean that being at the mercy of the vagaries of supply and demand is less than ideal. They propose a change to the herbs they offer to allow more certainty to the High Herbalist. Specifically the two herbs they consider most useful in emergency situations; true vervain to preserve life and marrowort to treat immediate, life-threatening injuries.

If the High Herbalist wishes to enact this change, they should

instruct the Ambassador to accept on their behalf. The Kruidenkenner visiting the Sybella Cross physician's hall would shift to providing these specific herbs in the quantities proposed, and at the same price the High Herbalist was previously paying for random herbs.

The civil service suggest that this approach might be taken elsewhere as well; wherever the Kruidenkenner are currently providing random herbs they might be persuaded to provide specific herbs. It might even be possible that such changes could be negotiated whenever the Imperial demand for herbs shifted – changing what their ministries provided in response to the request of the title holder. It would be up to the Ambassador to pursue such possibilities, however.

Mead and Mazzarine

Meade magazijn expansion

Commission Type: Ministry amendment (Senate Motion)

Location: Meade, Mitwold

Cost: 8 weirwood, 24 crowns in labour

Effect: Adds two additional tracks to the Master of the Root and Stem ministry

Special: Senate motion must specify two herbs to be added to the ministry

- The Kruidenkenner propose expanding their magazijn in Meade
- Doing so would allow the Master of the Root and Stem to add two additional ministry tracks to allow them to purchase specific herbs

The Empire has recently completed a project to dredge the Westmere in Mitwold. The city of Meade already has

a magazijn – a warehouse specifically used by the Kruidenkenner – that allows the Master of the Root and Stem to purchase large amounts of bladeroot from the 'Delves.

Never being shy about opportunities for profit, and interested in new markets in the western Empire, the Kruidenkenner propose an expansion of their presence there. Expanding the Meade magazijn would require 8 wains of weirwood, and 24 crowns in labour. It would take three months to complete, and would allow the Master of the Root and Stem to add two additional purchase tracks to their ministry. In the Senate motion commissioning the expansion, they would need to specify which two of imperial roseweald, marrowort, cerulean mazzarine, or true vervain they wanted the Kruidenkenner to provide. The prices and amounts, at least initially, would be the same as those they are paying for Bladeroot.

This opportunity remains available until the end of the year; if it has not been taken up by the end of the Winter Solstice 386YE, then it will be lost.

The civil service suggest that if the Kruidenkenner investment in Meade does well, it might sponsor greater interest in the city among other Sarcophan Delves concerns. Their current interest is likely threefold. Demand for herbs at the Ivarsgard docks has declined sharply in recent years, and the threat of Dho'uala has made the Semmerlak less appealing to the Kruidenkenner. The expansion of Meade's waterfront, and its increasing prestige as a trade hub, is appealing to the Sarcophan herbalists. And thanks to the Children of Wrecks, the path through the Gullet is significantly safer at the moment than the Bay of Catazar.

Flowers in Frost

- Florian and Gelder Kraft have approached the farm owners of Wintermark with a business opportunity.
- Farm owners in Hahnmark will be polled on whether they support the opportunity, with other farmers in the territory following suit
- Accepting the opportunity provides an opportunity to gain access to a rare delicacy called viezesmaak, but removes the benefits provided by Brenna's Gift
- A meeting of Hahnmark's farmers has been arranged at TBC at the tree of names in the Wintermark camp to vote on whether to endorse the offer

Connoisseurs of Anvil's finer pleasures may have previously met brothers Florian and Gelder Kraft - brewers of substances designed with recreation rather than practicality in mind. This season they are not travelling to Anvil in person; they are too busy touring Wintermark with an unusual offer.

The pair have come into possession of some cuttings of the rare vlinderbloem - a delicate plant with a sublime dual-petalled pink flower that only blooms in alpine climes. The petals of the blossom are a key ingredient in a traditional Sarcophan delicacy - viezesmaak - which is apparently all the rage in Faraden at the moment. One of the reasons viezesmaak is so rare, is the difficulty in getting the plants to flower within the Delves themselves, as the environment is far too warm, damp, and muggy for them to flourish.

Florian and Gelder have hit upon a novel solution to the problem of securing enough vlinderbloem. They want to invest in the farms of Hahnmark, offering each farm owner in the nation the opportunity to give over some of their land to raising

a vlinderbloem patch in return for a portion of viezesmaak brewed with Wintermark-grown blossoms. Those prepared to give over more land to a harvest would receive more viezesmaak.

The farmers of Hahnmark are a little reticent to take these earnest-appearing Sarcophan at face value, and look to Anvil for guidance. If the farmers who attend Anvil think it is a good idea to take this offer, then many of them will do the same. If they think it's a bad idea, then Florian and Gelder will have little uptake for their scheme. After some discussion with the civil service, the egregore has managed to put together a list of Winterfolk farm owners who are attending the Autumn Equinox. The plan is to hold an informal gathering of these people, and put the matter to a show of hands, with a simple majority setting the message the egregores will spread among the interested farm owners. The Sarcophan entrepreneurs will be sending a few samples of viezesmaak along with the egregore to show the farmers what they will be receiving and helping to produce.

If the scheme goes ahead, then every Hahnmark farmer will receive two doses of viezesmaak each season while the Sarcophan remain invested in the territory. They will also have the ability to trade some of their income in downtime for additional doses on a season-by-season basis. This ability would remain available for at least a year, perhaps longer. The Kraft family would also seek other opportunities to make a profit in Wintermark. Their interests are not restricted to Hahnmark; for example they would be exporting their viezesmaak through the newly revitalised port of Fisk taking advantage of the recently established trade route to Faraden. Where the Kraft family lead the way, other Sarcophan merchants might well follow.

The opportunity is not without cost however; with more land

given over to growing vlinderbloem, there would be significantly less surplus food, meat, and seed contributed by Wintermark farmers to Brenna's Gift. The Sarcophan plan to make use of the trading posts to work with the local farmers, but that will mean more of the business undertaken there relating to their plan. As such the great work would cease providing additional money to the farms of Wintermark. The silos themselves would be undamaged, and if the farmers of Wintermark chose to end their association with the Kraft family it would be possible to re-establish their support for Hahnmark's farmers. But as long as farmers were growing vlinderbloem, their monetary support would be lost.

Florian and Gelder need a decision by the end of the Autumn Equinox if they are to get their new business partnership established. The egregore will host the meeting of Hahnmark farmers at TBC in the Wintermark camp.

An Expensive Letter

- Jasmijn Dijkgraaf, a Sarcophan merchant offers to convey a letter of introduction to the Tetrarchs of Elakar
- The letter will only be delivered if Jasmijn Dijkgraaf can approve its contents
- If the Sarcophan deliver the letter they will charge the ambassador eleven thrones for the service

Last season the Imperial ambassador's counterpart politely declined to provide more information about the Elakar. They confirmed that they enjoy good relations with the small nation, but provided no details, claiming they needed to respect the Elakar's privacy. In reality, the notorious greedy Sarcophan were clearly more concerned with guarding the trade monopolies they enjoy with the Elakar - so the only details they

provided were to confirm that they were unaware of any official Elakar delegation to the Empire.

Now, they appear to have had something of a change of heart. Or perhaps more likely they have simply devised a way to profit from the Empire's interest in the Elakar. Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike has passed on an offer from the Jasmijn Dijkgraaf, a small family allied with the House of the Vulture. This is not a wealthy family, at least not by Sarcophan standards, but the Bedelaar talks of Jasmijn in a complimentary way that implies the Dijkgraafs are an up and coming enterprise with shrewd leadership.

Jasmijn Dijkgraaf is offering to convey a letter of introduction to the Elakar Tetrarchs. The cost for this service will be eleven thrones, "consummate with the difficulties involved". The Dijkgraafs state they will only pass on a single letter, and only after they have read and approved it, to ensure there are no repercussions for the Delves should the Empire's correspondence offend the Tetrarchs. If they refuse to pass on the letter for any reason, they will return it and the eleven thrones.

Jasmijn will only accept a letter from Thanmir Hrafnar and no other. She is aware that the position is up for re-election and that Thanmir may or may not continue as Ambassador to the Delves, but she claims that the ambassador is well known and respected in the Delves. Thus, she will only take a letter from him, regardless of who the ambassador is. There is no issue if Thanmir chooses not to take the Dijkgraafs up on their offer, but she assures the Empire that there will be categorically no contact of any kind with the Elakar if they choose to decline. **(OOO note:** A winged message sent to Jasmijn Dijkgraaf in The Palace of the Vultures, Sarcophan, Sarcophan Delves may be conveyed to the Tetrarchs of the Elakar if the Ambassador to

the Delves includes eleven thrones in their hand-in baggy to pay the delivery charges).