

The tale that speaks to your heart

Tipoa sat in the little trellis garden, its balcony overlooking the Holy City. One of the little raptors her Cardinal kept here - as pets but also, she was certain, to unsettle the unwary - nuzzled at her pocket.

"Clever girl", she thought, and pulled out the strip of meat she'd brought for just this moment. She tossed it into a corner, and the feathered beast chattered to itself happily and ran after the morsel.

"She's getting large", she remarked, and sipped her cocoa.

"Yes", intoned the Cardinal, sitting opposite her with their own steaming mug. "Not much longer and we shall have to see about moving her to larger accommodations. But let us return to the matter at hand. You were inspired by the Casinean reports, then?"

"It matters little, I think, what inspired me the most. Certainly the tale of Amika is the more rousing of the two! But..." Tipoa shuffled the papers of her report that she had lain before the Assembly earlier that day. "There is creditable virtue here in both cases, and while both I and my colleague had... questions, I believe they have more or less been answered to the satisfaction of - well, I was not conducting the same inquiry that the Assembly of Ambition was. You asked me to look into the matter, and there it is. They are serious candidates both."

The little raptor was back, and this time it was the turn of the Cardinal to toss a meat strip into the shade of their apartment. "I agree. There is little question that as reported both acted with virtue. Amika was a singular individual." They smiled.

"And, as your report identifies, that is the issue. A singular individual caught in a nexus of historical opportunity... are they inspirational? Not just to you, to us, but to the soul that seeks virtue under Asav's yoke? I think you already know the answer."

Tipoa nodded. "Alberto was an ordinary person who stood by his convictions when he did not have to. There is loyalty to his cousin there, but - but there is a bravery there too. It made me wish for the same bravery in the face of opposition. He died for what he knew to be right." She shivered. "I was reminded of the time I was sent to conduct that excommunication of - I cannot quite remember the details now. The Imperial Ambassador who had slighted us, you sent me to... well. When I delivered our judgement, I thought I would surely be struck down, but I made myself do it all the same. Yet I nearly ran! I am not ashamed to admit it, because I did not, but I nearly did. I learned, that day, the limits of my own courage. Alberto faced much greater peril and yet he stood firm."

"You see something in the tale that speaks to your heart. I feel it too. There is virtue in both, but Alberto's story - especially if presented properly and clearly - there is something here that could light fires across Asavean satrapies, I think." The Cardinal nodded. "You've done well, and the rest will be in other hands. Perhaps it is time to revisit that promotion? You should prepare yourself for evaluation."

The meeting was over at that - the Cardinal never used more words than they needed to, and their servants quickly learned the meanings in every syllable.

"Ma'am." Tipoa stood. "Utredare Tipoa reporting, then. Investigation closed."

The feathered raptor chirruped its approval.

Overview

Among the six great powers, the Sumaah Republic are simultaneously rivals to, and uneasy allies of, the Empire. Their shared practice of the Way both unites them through virtue, and divides them through disagreements about how the faith should be practiced and spread. The Liberty Pact, of which they are founding members, has helped strengthen their ties to the Empire, as has their involvement in direct action against those who propagate the abhorrent practice of slavery. Much of their strength at the moment is committed to war with the Asavean Archipelago, but they are no less committed to spreading the Way through the entire world even with idolatrous navies at their very door.

The Sumaah ambassador to the Empire is Oxtitocszin, who holds the rank of Censor of wood, metal and stone and is a member of the High House of Pride (the Sumaah equivalent of the Pride Assembly, but with significantly more responsibility and leeway to pursue foreign diplomacy). They advise not just the Sumaah präster, but the House of the People (the Sumaah equivalent of the Imperial Senate). By all accounts they are an even-handed, level-headed individual, and a devout practitioner of the Way.

Sumaah Republic

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: Zemeh
- Ambassador: Accalon of Highguard

War in the West

- The Sumaah remain at war with the Asavean Archipelago
- Imperial fleets fight alongside Sumaah vessels, especially those of the Frieøyer
- The House of People and the Houses of Virtue have put aside funds to reward Imperial fleet captains for their aid, while the Frieøyer are showing their gratitude in their own way
- Imperial traders find the port of Zemeh additionally profitable

The Sumaah Republic remains at war with the forces of the Asavean Archipelago. The Plenum has pledged that they will not stop until they have appropriate retribution for the Sumaah role in the attack on Chalonsio by burning a Sumaah city much as they did Siroc, but so far the Sumaah have managed to prevent them from doing so. In part this is due to Imperial naval support for the Sumaah. Imperial efforts to thwart the Asavean blockade of Zemeh have been greatly appreciated, and as of the Summer Solstice have also been greatly expanded. During the summit, Maarit Suvidottir raised a mandate in the General Assembly to send Isolde Hannasdottir to urge virtuous Imperial sailors and captains to journey to Sumaah and help them resist the depredations of Asavean pirates. Ships from every nation except Varushka and Urizen - thanks to the mandate not receiving a greater majority - now make the trip west to support the Empire's ally in the Liberty Pact.

The House of the People, the Sumaah equivalent of the Imperial Senate, welcomes these captains. They've set aside a fund of money each season to recompense the captains, and the House of Prosperity has ensured that every captain who wishes it receives a small amount of liao to support their virtue. The Frieøyer - the descendants of those pirates converted by

Zemress to the Way - have gone further. They offer berths and repairs to any Imperial ship that visits one of the many small ports that dot their island home. In the spirit of Zemress, they also share the bounties they seize from the Asaveans with those who fight alongside them. As such, a standard imperial fleet without any upgrades or enchantments that takes part in the adventure in the west will receive 96 rings, 3 doses of liao, an ingot each of Asavean orichalcum, tempest jade, and iridescent gloaming, and two bottles of Frygtede øglebryg.

The latter is a unique preparation that roughly translates as "Basilisk Brew" - a popular healing elixir favoured by the Frieøyer that is particularly potent when used by those dedicated to the Virtues. Its recipe is a closely guarded secret of the Frieøyer, who make great use of it when fighting on board ships, and also sees extensive use by the Sumaah armies. The name of this sweet, dark, mildly alcoholic beverage is something of a mouthful for Imperial citizens, however, who have taken to referring to it as "Oilybrag" to the amusement of the Sumaah they battle alongside.

The Asavean attacks on ships trading with the Empire have had greatly reduced impact on Sumaah traders as a direct consequence of Imperial commitments in the west. It is still challenging for Sumaah vessels to reach Imperial ports however, but the House of the People and the High House of Prosperity are working together to devise a way to support trading ships without weakening the defence of their coast. Censor Oxtitocszin believes that as long as a significant force is able to support the Sumaah in their own waters - they estimate an effective fighting strength of 3000 each season - they will be able to resume full trade with the Empire (restoring at least some of the money lost to the Imperial treasury from tariffs).

At the minute, a combination of demand for Imperial imports

and gratitude for the fleet presence in the Sea of Salt means that any trading vessel visiting the port of Zemeh will trade there as if it were one rank higher.

OOO Note: A reasonably phys-rep for the oilybrag resource received by fleets helping fight the Asaveans in the Sea of Salt might be flat cola or a similar sweet, sticky, brown liquid, in a potion bottle.

Wintermark Willing

- The Wintermark assembly also raised and endorsed a mandate to offer aid to Sumaah
- The House of Pride has arranged a small gift in thanks, to be delivered by the Ambassador

During the Summer Solstice, Rafe of Wintermark raised a mandate to support Sumaah endorsed by the assembly. In the end, it was superceded by that of Maarit Suvidottir, but it does not go unnoticed. The House of Pride has made a point of putting together a package of twenty liao and asked that the Ambassador deliver it to Rafe with their thanks. A rare Frieøyer Präster dedicated to Pride rather than Prosperity has insisted on including four bottles of Frygtede øglebryg as well. The package should be available for the ambassador to pick up from the Hub during the Autumn Equinox.

Liberty and Freedom

- The Sumaah are signatories to, and founder members of, the Liberty Pact

The Sumaah attitude to the Liberty Pact has not changed since last season. They remain keen to drop the nation of Axos from the pact, arguing that the Pact would be more

decisive if it was led by Sumaah, the Empire, and the Commonwealth.

There is some interest in what the Empire intends to do about the so-called Freedom Accord, but the House of the People sees no need for a joint venture. The Freedom Accord is about slavery. It is supported by the blasphemous, heretical, idolatrous Asavean Plenum and the spiritually bankrupt Principalities of Jarm. Anyone who joined in such an alliance would simply declare themselves an enemy of the Liberty Pact, an enemy of virtue, and a supporter of slavery. If any smaller nation in the Sumaah orbit attempted to do so, they would ensure they thought again or faced the fate that should befall any unvirtuous people. Either a nation is virtuous - which means they see slavery for the evil that it is - or they should be made virtuous. Presumably the Empire has the same ability as Sumaah to ensure their neighbours know the importance of not allying with slavers?

On Ritual Magic

- The Sumaah are pleased to receive two fortification supporting rituals from the Empire
- The Sevenfold Path and Rod and Shield will now gain a bequest of liao in thanks for the rituals
- They are interested in rituals that help support or defend against spies and scouts
- Oxitocszin addresses incorrect rumours that the Sumaah have contact with Yaw'nagrah

Censor Oxitocszin expresses their thanks to the Imperial Conclave for providing them with not one but both of the ritual texts they asked for. Albrecht von Holberg secured the funds to

disseminate Hammers of the Brilliant Shore on behalf of the Sevenfold Path and Stalwart Stand on Solid Ground was disseminated thanks to the declaration of Grandmaster Sakari Nightscale. In accord with the agreement made, the Sumaah people undertake to provide the vaults of the two orders with ten vials of liao apiece going forward.

Ambassador Accalon indicates that Imperial magicians are prepared to trade additional rituals as well. There is significant discussion in Sumaah about the offer to provide Foam and Spittle of the Furious Sea. Wizards of the republic are not by all accounts well-versed in large-scale curses such as this, and their mastery of Spring magic lies much more in the area of healing and support. The ritual has obvious strategic use against the Asaveans, whose military strength is tied up in their navies. In the end, however, Oxtitocszin declines the ritual. While the House of Courage is enthusiastic about the potential of the rituals to damage Asavean ships, the Houses of Prosperity and Vigilance are both deeply concerned about the implications for virtuous citizens in the territories targetted by the curses, and the House of the People likewise worries about the impact on Sumaah traders and fisherfolk.

Rivers of Life is interesting, but again the Sumaah decline. The ritual is powerful, and much less economically dangerous than the other Spring curse, but the House of Wisdom expresses concern about its impact on the vibrant plant and animal life of Sumaah. Given the sheer size of some of the creatures that roam Sumaah territories, such as the dire panthers that prey on the great drakes, there are lurid arguments about the potential side effects of infusing them with supernatural fertility. More significantly, as near as Sumaah wizards can tell the ritual works by pouring huge amounts of barely constrained Spring magic into an area. On balance, the Sumaah are not prepared to

risk its use.

The Sumaah have rituals that allow them to scry territories, and make use of a ritual similar to Drawing the Penumbral Veil that is apparently a little less potent but also more subtle on the rare occasions they need to shroud an area from enemy spying.

What attracts interest, however, is talk of rituals that help and hinder spy networks. As long as those rituals do not draw on the power of an eternal, they would like to know more. What would the Empire want in return?

One thing that is not available for trade at this time however is the ritual casually referred to that is a more potent version of Mantle of the Golden Orator. Censor Oxitocszin explains that while the Empire and Sumaah are united in the Liberty Pact, and share many articles of faith in common, the two nations are still ultimately rivals in the matter of the Way. It would be neither Wise nor Ambitious to share a tool that gives the Sumaah an edge over the Empire in the great endeavour to share the orthodox Way with the world.

Another matter that comes up largely by accident is that Censor Oxitocszin mentions hearing that the Empire believes the Sumaah have a close relationship with the eternal the Empire knows as Yaw'nagrah. They wish to lay that rumour to rest if possible. The Green Mother is judged far too dangerous to deal with, given the creature's obsession with indiscriminate growth and chaos. It is possible that this misunderstanding arose because there are Sumaah wizards who do have at least a distant relationship with Ossegrahn, who for some centuries was practically forgotten in the Empire. The Censor of Wood and Stone is quick to remind the Empire that virtuous Sumaah are very cautious in their dealings with eternal of any realm, particularly the Spring realm, and that none would consider meeting one or their representatives without the guidance of a

Präst.

Spittle and Sharks

- A combination of Asavean privateering, war in the Sea of Salt, and the Children of Wrecks are impacting Sumaah trade with the Empire
- The House of Pride asks that the ambassador deliver a spiritual reward to the warriors who helped rescue Präst Kauitalic from the Children of Wrecks

The discussion of Spring magic leads naturally into talk of the Children of Wrecks. Oxitocszin thanks Ambassador Accalon for warning about potential dangerous curses in Imperial waters, but suggests that a bigger impediment to trade with the Empire is the combination of the Asavean privateering and the war in the Sea of Salt. As mentioned above, however, as long as enough Imperial fleet captains help to balance the forces in the west, it will be easier for Sumaah merchant vessels to reach the Empire unmolested and restore at least some trade.

The recent successful efforts of the Ambassador on behalf of the Republic, to rescue Präst Kauitalic from the pirates known as the Children of Wrecks, have been praised in the House of the People and presented as another example of the way the two nations can support one another. Kauitalic is a promising up-and-coming leader in the Sumaah Republic - a galvanising spark in the ongoing struggle against Asavea - and their loss would have been a true tragedy. Ambassador Accalon has said that they have seen to it that those who treated Kauitalic after the rescue have been identified, and are properly paid, but the High House of Pride asks that the Ambassador also track down those warriors instrumental in rescuing the präst and arrange for each of them to receive either a dedication or a virtuous aura of

their choice to recognise their work. If the Ambassador is prepared to do this, the Sumaah will contribute one liao for each individual. All the Ambassador need to is tell them how many people were involved and reassure them the reward has been delivered.

The Civil Service note that while Oxitoczin is not personally familiar with the Sentinel Gate, the Sumaah obviously understand something of how it works. Oxitoczin will be expecting to provide somewhere in the region of 50 liao and anything significantly more than that may be queried.

Alberto, Amika, and Asavea

- Sumaah continue to involve themselves with pilgrims of the Way in Asavea, but the war with the Plenum means their efforts are less impactful than those of the Empire at the moment
- The Sumaah have begun the process of recognising Alberto Acciai as an exemplar of Courage

The Sumaah Republic has long had a degree of influence among secret followers of the Way in the Asavean Archipelago. Their ability to wield that influence has always been a little limited, due to their insistence on a degree of orthodoxy that makes it impossible for them to directly aid many sects. Their efforts have also been suffering recently due to open warfare but also paradoxically due to the efforts of the Empire. The Asaveans make no distinction between Imperial missionaries and Sumaah präster when it comes to flinging them off cliffs. The Sumaah do not resent the Imperial involvement however - far from it. It is clearly a grand Ambition of the Sumaah to convert as many of the Asaveans as possible to the Way, and then help them to overthrow the Plenum and the blasphemous,

heretical temples of the false gods. The current war with Asavea does not change that - the Sumaah continue to pour whatever resources they can spare into spreading the Way because to do otherwise would be a profound failure of Courage, Ambition, and Pride.

During the Summer Solstice, two Sumaah investigators visited Anvil to speak to Imperial priests about the stories of two Asavean pilgrims involved in inspiring rebellious action in the Archipelago. After they bring their report back to Sumaah, there is the obligatory process of discussion, argument, and scrutiny. The Sumaah are generally slow to recognise new exemplars and paragons, taking significantly more time to weigh up the story and life of an individual before they declare them a true inspiration. For now though, Oxtitocszin reports that the findings of the Houses of Courage and Ambition are clear. From what the Empire has said, both Amika and Alberto Acciai acted virtuously and inspired others.

The situation in Sumaah however mirrors that in the Empire almost exactly in that the Houses of Virtue do not recognise Amika Acciai as an exemplar, but do recognise Alberto Acciai as likely being an exemplar of Courage. The process of making someone a truly recognised exemplar is more convoluted than it is in the Empire, but the Sumaah are exploring Alberto, not Amika. The main reason is that while Amika is clearly inspired and inspirational from their commitment to their cause, Sumaah opinion is that it is the more direct, Courageous example of Alberto that will ultimately have the greatest effect on Asavea and the spreading of the Way. The direct, open action of Alberto also likely resonates well with the Sumaah's own history of overthrowing the Asavean occupation by force of arms and bold action.

There's no suggestion of animosity, schism, heresy or anything

else here. The Summah do not deny that Alberto is inspirational, only that they are not recognised as an exemplar. The fact the Empire has recognised Amika, but not recognised Alberto, is seen simply as a reflection of the fact that the two nations view the Way differently. It's also clear that the Sumaah Houses of Virtue are not closing the door to Amika - they will simply wait and see how long the legacy of the firebrand leader of the rebellion lasts, and how many souls it touches. It appears that in Sumaah at least it is very rare to recognise anyone as an exemplar or paragon until at the very least a decade after their death when the true impact of their lives can be better assessed.

More importantly, while Sumaah and the Empire disagree as to which Acciai is the exemplar, they both agree that the rebellion they inspired was virtuous and worthy of inspiration. As news that the two great virtuous powers have effectively endorsed the Asavean founders of the recent rebellion spreads, it will in turn draw more Asaveans and Asavean slaves to the Way. The House of Pride is in absolute agreement with the Imperial Ambassador on one thing in particular. While Sumaah would rather the people of Asavea look to Timoj than Bastion for their understanding of the Way, it is ultimately more important that they are shown the truth and given all the aid they need to cast off the twin evils of slavery and idolatry. In that, at least, the two Synods are surely in agreement.

Saul and Vardas

- The Sumaah have little knowledge of Saul of the Cora
- The House of Courage is open to investigation of Amaa the Wanderer
- The matter of Vardas is one of significant concern to the Sumaah, although they do not consider them to be a paragon

themselves

Ambassador Accalon made some inquiries of their opposite number regarding a shell bracelet, apparently associated with an Imperial missionary known as Saul of the Cora. Oxtitocszin regretfully reports that the Sumaah know little about Saul and nothing about a particular bracelet. There is a story that has been reported a few times by Sumaah missionaries who have spoken to slave sects in the northern Archipelago about a man who brought a message of hope and the power of the human spirit, but was captured by agents of the Plenum and sacrificed. Specific details differ, but each tale agrees that the man escaped the judgement of the Asavean priests. Some say he transformed into a flock of coloured birds that scattered in all directions, others that he became sea-foam rather than drowning, and one tale says that three leomarids emerged from the water where he fell and carried him to safety and that he still walks the shoreline telling his virtuous tales to any who can find him. The Sumaah have far fewer contacts in the northern Archipelago, especially since the short-lived civil war, but if they learn more of the sect or the bracelet they will be certain to pass it to the Ambassador. This would be made easier if the Ambassador could share more details about Saul of the Cora with Sumaah scholars.

There is also interest in talk of Amma the Wanderer, the exemplar of Courage recognised by the Sumaah that some scholars believe may be Adelmarr the Lion by a different name. While Ambassador Accalon says the most recent piece of evidence comes from an eternal, which gives the Sumaah pause, the House of Courage remains interested. Oxtitocszin vouchsafes that if Imperial scholars were to investigate the matter to see if they could prove a connection one way or the other; regardless of the outcome the inspiration of Amma would be brought to the Empire. The House of Courage would be

more than happy to cooperate on such an endeavour, whether by the secular scholars who report to the Minister of Historical Research or the virtuous researchers under instruction from the Lepidean Librarian.

Talk of the Lepidean Librarian, however, leads on to a much more serious matter. The Ambassador also made the astonishing claim that the work of the Empire's Lepidean Librarian has uncovered that the Vigilant paragon Vardas was not in fact a real individual, but rather a collection of tales of other wardens intentionally misrepresented by the chronicler Ion. Oxtitocszin passes along requests from both the House of Vigilance and the House of Wisdom, both of whom would like to see the evidence of the past life vision that proves this.

Vardas is not a paragon renowned in Sumaah, but his name is at least known there. Oxtitocszin believes that they are a pivotal figure in Imperial understanding of Vigilance, and understands the dire implications of discovering that an inspiration is in fact false. While Sumaah präster may disagree on the exact role of paragons and exemplars in the Way, they are generally in agreement that the fundamental humanity of an inspiration is key to their role as an inspiration. To find one has been made up out of whole cloth, and a paragon of Vigilance at that...

The Civil Service mention that both the research done by Jared of the Suns of Couros into the life of Saul of the Cora and the more recent document about the Life of Vardas commissioned by Hazelelponi of the Shattered Tower are available for general consumption. Should the Ambassador wish to do so, copies could be prepared and dispatched to the Sumaah embassy in Necropolis at negligible cost. (OOO Note: If the Ambassador says they have done this in their letter to Oxtitocszin, we will assume the civil service have done so at their request. If they wish to provide only parts of the research, they will need to find another method of delivering them).

Commitment and Virtue

- The letter of Emperor Vesna has been well received in Sumaah
- An emissary will visit Anvil at TBC to deliver the gift

Oxtitocszin has one final note, as they offer formal thanks to the Imperial Throne Emperor Vesna Borkovna Prochnost for their official letter. It's contents have been conveyed to both the House of the People, and to all the High Houses of Virtue. The acknowledgement there of the special relationship between the two nations lead to some debate, but the outcome of those discussions was broadly positive. While the Empire and the Republic might disagree on the details, the broad commitment of the two nations to upholding and spreading their individual visions of the Way throughout the entire Known World and beyond cannot be questioned. Along with their distant allies in the Commonwealth, the Liberty Pact has shown what can be achieved when virtuous folk work together. As the Emperor says, "the Proud seek to build each other up and inspire each other to greatness."

Of particular note is the pledge that the Empire is still committed to ensuring every slave is freed. They applaud the Empire's efforts in Asavea in particular; the Sumaah know what it means to be subject to the hateful practices of the Nemorian temples and would not see anyone enslaved by blasphemous, idolatrous, heretics. The House of the People, the High Houses of Virtue, and the Sumaah Republic as a whole will not stop until the folk under the Plenum yoke are free to pursue their own destiny in virtue.

The Censor of Wood and Stone also thanks the Throne for acknowledging the gift offered to Ambassador Accalon, and that it will not be seen as an attempted bribe, but a gesture

offered to resolve a personal issue in which the ambassador's Pride was injured. Consequently, during the Autumn Equinox an emissary from the High House of Pride, on behalf of the Sumaah people, will visit Anvil to deliver the gift in person, to ensure that it does not go astray. The emissary will arrive at around TBC, and will seek out the Highborn camp to make the presentation.