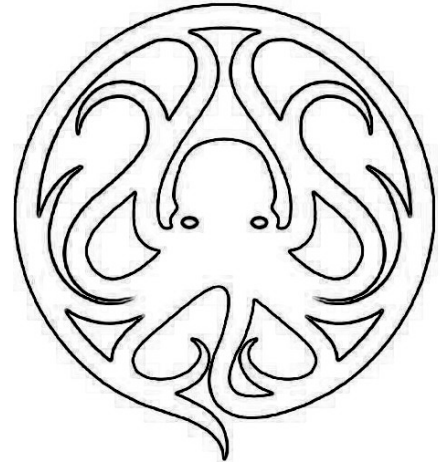


*Ambassador,*

*I think that we need to speak plainly, yes?*

*I want to be clear. Your Senate is refusing to buy white granite from us – has backed out of an agreement with the Tarquins part-way through – because they disapprove of our use of slaves? Yet they are more than happy for their ship captains to buy our orichalcum, our tempest jade, and our iridescent gloaming. Who do they think gathers those resources!*



*No, this is not about slaves, sto pensando. Our agents tell us that as we speak citizens of your glorious Empire are preparing to buy several hundred slaves from the Princes of Jarm. You can imagine how amusing we find this, I think?*

*Perhaps you should point out to your Senate that the trade in magical crystals that they have until recently enjoyed with the Jarmish is also based on the blood of slaves. Who do you think gathers the crystals? The noble Magician-Princes?*

*Yet the Senate is not condemning trade with them. Is that not amusing, Madame l'ambasciatore?*

*And to make an incident of one Sumaah ship ... do your Senate realise that we are at war with these upstarts? Could you pass on the message for me, perhaps? "Asavea is at war with the Sumaah! They board our vessels, slaughter their crews, steal our ships ... they foment rebellion among our people ... they poison others against us. Yes, we sink their warships whenever we can!"*

*Perhaps some plain-speaking will help them understand the situation here in the west. We do not complain about your war with the Grendel – a people with whom we have enjoyed decades of peaceful trade – so I fail to see how your Senate can take umbrage with our war with the Sumaah which has been going on for nearly five centuries.*

*I am sanguine bout the curses placed on poor Alonso. They faded in time, after all. He is a little wiser – a little better prepared for the unexpected – he will make a better diplomat for it, once the sting of being so mistreated has faded.*

*Il patriarca Tarquinius, however – il padre d'Alonso – is not amused that a scion of his blood has been tormented in this way – and that was before the double insult of throwing the white granite deal back in his face. He demands to know what steps have been taken to investigate the slight against the child of his line, and who has been held to account. If you wish to repair relations with the Tarquinius – if you*

*want his family to stop speaking ill of your entire Empire to the Plenum – then you should make an example of these Reckoners, and these Varushkan streghe who attacked an amabassador of our nation.*

*The Plenum is sometimes slow to move, but they are likewise slow to forget. A couple of suggestions if I may:-*

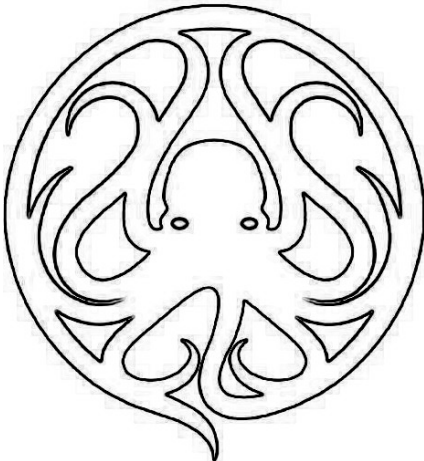
*Firstly, perhaps you should prevail on your Senate to remove this ridiculous restriction to trade, this law against the trade of granite, mithril, ilium, and weirwood. As soon as possible, would be ideal. Otherwise the Plenum may decide that your Empire of a bare four centuries thinks it is better than the glorious Asavean Archipelago.*

*Secondly, I suggest very strongly that a shrine to the Black Bull or Balo of the Foam be built on the docks of Sarvos so that our mariners can practice their faith – a faith that was old before the first blocks of stone were lain for your White City. This would send a message to the Plenum that the Empire respects the ancient traditions of the Asavean people. It would also indicate that the rabid priests of your Synod have been brought to heel. Or do you prefer that our people see reflected in you the same crazed orthodoxy that makes it impossible for us to find a peaceful solution to the Summah problem?*

*Behind these problems I see the hand of your Synod. Relations between our nations will become more and more difficult if we must constantly pick our way through the shaols and reefs of your religion whenever we wish to engage in trade, or to offer support to our friends.*

*Perhaps you should respond to the insults of the Sumaah with more than words. If your Empire has any pride, declare war on them and send your ships to prey on their shipping as they prey on ours.*

*The state of relations between us is deteriorating – you cannot expect to attack our way of life, complain about our wars, and renege on trade deals and think that we will not be slighted by this. Still, it is not too late to restore the friendship we have enjoyed – provided your actions show that you take our concerns seriously.*



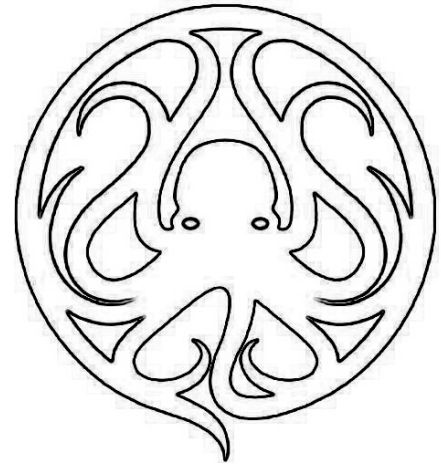
*But there is another insult to our people then the Plenum will have to consider whether it wants any part of a nation so lacking in noble pride that it allows farmers to vote in its Senate.*

*Lady Madrianna of the Blue Stones etc etc*

*Duke Ferrero Sanguineo Rezia di Tassato*

*Ah! I am pleased to hear from you indeed! Espero que a senhor está bem!*

*You should not be concerned – you may have as much time as you like to take advantage of my generous offer.*



*Not least because I am afraid that actually taking advantage of it – sending weirwood to our shipyard – would be against the Imperial law recently passed by your Senate.*

*Eu sinto muito, but I do not believe it would be politic at this time for me to aid and abet an Imperial citizen in breaking a law – particularly one of such recent vintage. The only think I can suggest is that there is a bright side here which is that you can continue to accumulate weirwood until the ridiculous, insulting law is repealed and then our most prestigious shipyard can provide you with a fitting vessel for the great Duke Ferrero Sanguineo!*

*I am sure you will not be offended if I offer a small prayer at a shrine of the Lord Isso Mãos de Ouro – our God of fair-handed trade – that this unfortunate state of affairs comes to a prompt and mutually satisfying conclusion before the Plenum is forced to take more drastic action in the face of the Imperial insult.*

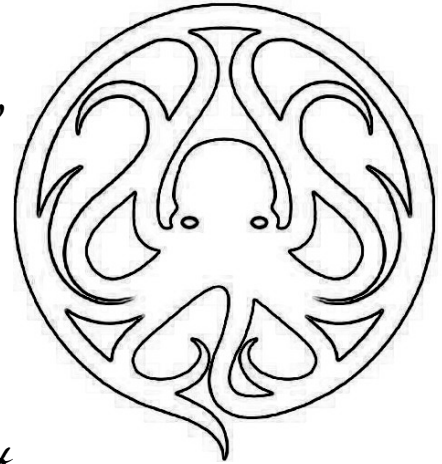
*While I have your attention however – I hope you will indulge my curiosity. The wind whispers that you are the motivating force behind the acquisition of slaves from the Principalities of Jarm? I was not aware that the Empire had reversed its stance on the question of slaves. I would be interested to hear the details of your arrangement, if you are of a mind to continue our correspondence?*

*Spero di diventare vostro amico e alleato – preghero' ai Mille per la vostra prosperita'*

*Lady Madrianna of the Blue Stones  
Memoria*

*Madam Consul*

*I understand that you are an advisor to the Senate on political affairs? Your role is not entirely dissimilar to my own here in Nemoria.*



*It is a shame I must begin our correspondence on a sour note, but the Plenum wishes to express it's deep concern about your Senate's decision to make trade in ilium, mithril, weirwood, and white granite between the Empire and the Asarvean Archipelago.*

*I understand that this was motivated by disapproval of the way in which our white granite is quarried? Yet I must in good conscience remind you that our orichalcum, our tempest jade, our iridescent gloaming, and even our cerulean mazzarine are mined and harvested in the same fashion.*

*There is a great deal of dissatisfaction with this slight against our people. I might go so far as to suggest that you meet with l'ambasciatore di Traviciana as a matter of some urgency, and see if some resolution can be achieved.*

*In the event that l'ambasciatore is not available, I feel it only appropriate to offer the same suggestions I offered to her.*

*In the interests of preserving our good relations, it would be ideal if the criminals who assaulted Alonso Tarquinius while he was on official business both for il patriarca Tarquinius, and for my own office, were identified and punished severely for attacking an Asarvean citizen who came to your Empire in good faith.*

*The Plenum is deeply unhappy about this embargo on trade between our nations. It suggests that the Empire is not sincere in its overtures of friendship, if it is denouncing our cultural traditions behind our backs.*

*Our mariners and traders are deeply unhappy that they are not permitted to practice their faith while they are moored in Imperial ports. In the wake of the embargo, it is certainly not a good time to be suggesting that the Empire considers the faith of the Asarvean people to be distasteful.*

*Finally, we understand that the Sumaah Republic has declared war on the Senate. The Asarvean navy is, of course, prepared to protect your trading vessels in our waters from the wicked Sumaah pirates – but it might be a sign of good faith for the Senate to shoulder at least some of the burden of ensuring the many, many captains who visit Nemoria do so without having their ships and cargo stolen by the jungle zealots.*

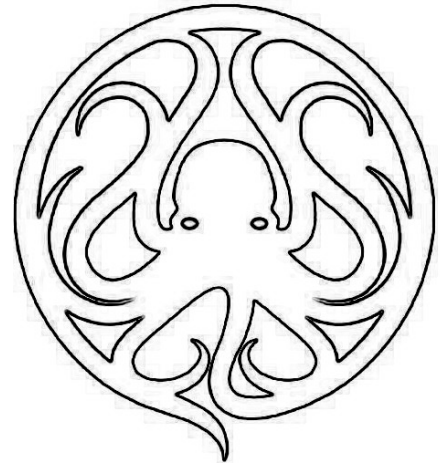
*Spero di diventare vostro amico e alleato - preghero' ai Mille per la vostra prosperita'*

*Lady Madrianna of the Blue Stones, Nemoria*

*Senator*

*May Lord Isso Mãos de Ouro grant his even-handed blessings to you!*

*I felt it was an appropriate time to contact you directly. While I am sure l'ambasciatore di Traviciana is doing an excellent job I thought that it might be politic to keep you apprised of the situation here in Memoria. You have after all demonstrated remarkable skill at smoothing out the minor wrinkles so common in international affairs.*



*The decision of your Senate to embargo trade between our great nations has not been well received by the Plenum. I regret to inform you that il patriarca Tarquinius has categorically withdrawn his offer to sell white granite to the Empire, effective immediately and for the foreseeable future. He has already found another market in which his family can sell their stone.*

*If this embargo continues, it is likely that the Plenum will reconsider it's friendship with the Empire. If Imperial captains do not wish to profit from the sweat of our labourers, then we will not force them to do so – by which I mean, we may choose to cease selling our orichalcum, tempest jade, iridescent gloaming, and cerulean mazzarine to Imperial captains.*

*If Asavean merchants begin to avoid the Imperial shores – and why would they not given that your Synod clearly considers them dangerous heretics – I fear the traders in your Jewelled City might have to tighten their belts a little.*

*However, I am sure your Senate will see sense – apologise for the insult it has offered, repeal it's ridiculous law, and demonstrate its commitment to our alliance by setting aside funds for the construction of a temple of Balo in your beautiful city.*

*In the meantime, however, an opportunity has come my way.*

*While il patriarca Tarquinius is extremely angry, several of the ... less influential ... Plenum families are less proud. I have been instructed to offer you several wains of mithril and white granite at a reasonable price.*

*La matriarca Heraclien offers six wains of mithril, at a total cost of 200 Imperial crowns, while la matriarca Artabados offers seven wains of white granite at a total cost of 215 Imperial crowns. A factor who represents a nameless client (which I suspect to be the Rangabe – although I doubt that means very much to you) offers a princely 11 wains of white granite for sale 325 Crowns.*

*I'm afraid to say that these prices are not negotiable. I am sure you understand why I am not making this overture to l'ambasciatore – the amounts involved are hardly a matter for international trade! Also, I am confident I can trust your discretion in this regard – whereas I would not wish to put my untested relationship with the ambassador on the line by tempting her to ignore the foolish laws of the Senate.*

*In the event you are interested in any of these offers, it will be a simple matter for me to transfer Bourse certificates to you in return for prompt payment which I am sure you can arrange via Winged Messenger. If the messenger reaches me quickly enough I will endeavour to have the wains in your hand within the day.*

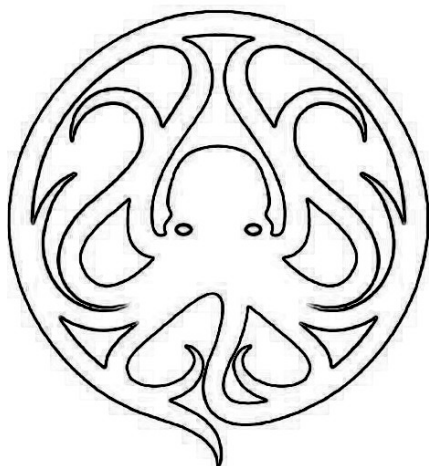
*Rest assured – my discretion is absolutely assured.*

*My supply of Imperial wains is limited, but if we are able to do business then I am sure several other Plenum families will come forward to make similar discreet arrangements – especially once this silly embargo has been removed.*

*Spero di diventare vostro amico e alleato - preghero' ai Mille per la vostra prosperita'*

*Lady Madrianna of the Blue Stones*

*Nemoria*



HEH WAS

I AM ILARCH CARMIA TIPHIONIS, OF THE BLOOD OF IPOTAVO, AND OF TIPHION SCION OF HIS LINE WHO CALLED THE GRAND COUNCIL OF THE YEAR OF SCOURGE.

YOUR LETTER WAS UNEXPECTED, BUT NOT UNWELCOME. YOUR QUESTIONS WERE UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT NOT EASY TO ANSWER.

SOME OF OUR GREATEST WARRIORS HAVE TRAINED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THEIR ANCESTORS, BUT IT IS A VERY PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND NOT ONE THAT CAN BE FORCED, OR BARTERED. THE GHOSTS OF OUR HONOURED DEAD RARELY CHOOSE TO EVEN SPEAK TO THOSE NOT OF THEIR BLOOD, AND FOR ONE TO ENTER INTO SUCH A PROFOUND BOND WITH A FOREIGNER IS UNPRECEDENTED. YOU WOULD DO BETTER TO SEEK OUT YOUR OWN ANCESTORS, YOUR OWN HONOURED DEAD, AND PETITION THEM FOR THEIR AID.

THE PEOPLE OF IPOTAVO ARE KNOW OF THE NAVARR. THEY KNOW OF YOUR RUTHLESS REPUTATION, OF YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE PATH OF VICTORY. OUR CITADEL OWES A DEBT TO YOUR PEOPLE; WITHOUT YOUR AID, AND THE AID OF URIZEN AND HIGHGUARD, WE MIGHT TODAY BE SLAVES TO THE DRUJ.

YET I CANNOT DISCHARGE THAT DEBT BY OFFERING YOU TUTELAGE BY THE SPIRITS OF THE HONOURED DEAD. EVEN A MASTER OF THE *NECROMANTIA* COULD NOT FORCE SUCH A THING.

I CANNOT EVEN AT THIS TIME OFFER YOU A PLACE ON THE WALLS OF IPOTAVO. WITH THE FALL OF THE TUNNELS OF KABAN, THE DRUJ ARE SCATTERED AND BROKEN IN AXOS - A MOPPING UP OF SPILLED ORCS IS NOTHING FOR WARRIORS SUCH AS YOURSELF.

THE PEOPLE OF SKOURA, HOWEVER, ARE RECRUITING MERCENARY-WARRIORS. IF YOU HAVE NOT VISITED THEIR GREAT VAULTED HALLS, YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS MAY WISH TO RISK THE JOURNEY SOUTH TO OFFER THEM AID. THEY ARE A RICH PEOPLE, AND PAY WELL.

THERE ARE OTHER POSSIBILITIES OF COURSE. A COUNCIL OF THE FOUR CITADELS HAS BEEN CONVENED, AND THE QUESTION OF THE EMPIRE DEBATED AND ANSWERED. ONCE WE HAVE AN EMBASSY - AND IT WOULD SUIT THE IPOTAVAN PEOPLE TO SEE SUCH AN EMBASSY RAISED IN THE NAVARR MARSHES OF THERUNIN - AND ONCE TRADE BETWEEN OUR PEOPLE IS SECURED BY COMMAND OF YOUR SENATE, THEN THERE WILL BE OTHER REASONS THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE NIKITIS AXOU WISH TO SPEAK TO THE NAVARR.

OLD MATTERS, STEEPED IN THE HISTORY OF BOTH OUR PEOPLE. ONCE THERE IS ACCORD BETWEEN AXOU AND EMPIRE, THEN PERHAPS ONCE AGAIN THERE CAN BE ACCORD BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY, AND THE PEOPLE OF THE CITADELS.

ILARCH CARMIA TIPHIONIS,  
OF THE BLOOD OF IPOTAVO, SCION OF TIPHION,  
IPOTAVO,  
AXOS



MADAME CONSUL,

I AM ILARCH CARMIA TIPHIONIS, OF THE BLOOD OF IPOTAVO, AND OF TIPHION SCION OF HIS LINE WHO CALLED THE GRAND COUNCIL OF THE YEAR OF SCOURGE. I WRITE TO YOU ON THE INSTRUCTION OF GRAND ILARCH ADONAI, WHO LEADS THE PEOPLE OF IPOTAVO AND IS OF THE TRUE LINE OF IPOTAVO.

WE HAVE RECEIVED COMMUNICATIONS FROM ONE SENATOR ADAMAH OF HIGHGUARD, SPEAKING OF MILITARY ALIGNMENT AGAINST THE GRENDEL, AND REQUESTING MAPS, AND SPEAKING OF OTHER DIVERS MATTERS.

THE MAJORITY OF THE LETTER WAS OFFENSIVELY RHYMED DOGGEREL, BUT THE GRAND ILARCH AT LEAST RECONGISES AN ATTEMPT TO INGRATIATE BY MIMICKING THE HIGH STYLE WHEN HE SEES IT. WE SUGGEST THAT YOUR DIPLOMATS DO NOT SEEK TO EMULATE THE STYLE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING IT - AND WE IN TURN WILL PHRASE OUR COMMUNICATION WITH YOU IN THE LOW STYLE. THE LOW STYLE MAY BE LESS STEEPED IN TRADITION, BUT IT ALLOWS FOR GREATER CLARITY WHEN DEALING WITH OUTSIDERS.

OUR PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN COUNSEL WITH THE PEOPLE OF THE CHAMBERS OF ISSYK, OF THE TOWERS OF KANTOR, OF THE HALLS OF MAYKOP. THE NIKITIS AXOU ARE IN AGREEMENT. IT FALLS TO ME TO TELL YOU OF THE DECISION THAT HAS BEEN REACHED. WHERE THE BLOOD OF ISSYK AND THE BLOOD OF KANTOR HAVE FAILED, THE SCIONS OF IPOTAVO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE IMPERIAL MERENARIES WHO CAME TO DEFEND OUR WALLS, WHO HELPED US LIBERATE THE TUNNELS OF KABAN, WHO HELPED US DRIVE OUT THE DRUJ. YET THOSE MERCENARIES HAVE BEEN PAID, AND WELL PAID - AND YOUR MILITARY COUNCIL GIVEN A GIFT OF CRYSTAL MANA IN RECOGNITION OF THE ROLE THEY PLAYED. THERE IS NO OBLIGATION BETWEEN OUR PEOPLE IN THIS REGARD.

THIS THEN IS THE AGREEMENT OF THE COUNSELLORS OF THE FOUR CITADELS.

BEFORE THERE CAN BE ANY NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE GRAND ILARCH AND THE PEOPLE OF THE EMPIRE, THERE MUST BE REOGNITION. AN EMBASSY OF WEIRWOOD AND WHITE GRANITE BUILT IN REDOUBT, IN ZENITH, IN NECROPOLIS, OR IN THE NAVARR MARSHES OF THERUNIN. AN AMBASSADOR APPOINTED TO AXOS, AND CIVIL SERVANTS SENT TO STAFF AN EMBASSY AMONG THE CITADELS.

BEFORE THERE CAN BE ANY TRADE BETWEEN THE AXOU AND THE IMPERIALS, A ROUTE FOR TRADE MUST EXIST. OPEN YOUR PORTS FORMALLY TO THE TRADERS OF AXOS, AND WHEN THE EMBASSY IS COMPLETE, SO IN TURN WILL THE BOUNTY OF THE CITADELS BE MADE AVAILABLE TO YOUR CAPTAINS.

THEN, ONCE THE RESPECT OF EQUALS IS SHOWN, ONCE TRADE FLOWS BETWEEN OUR NATIONS, WE WILL SEND FORMAL AMBASSADORS. THE TIME WILL BE RIGHT TO SPEAK NOT ONLY OF GRENDEL, BUT ALSO OF DRUJ; NOT ONLY OF SPIRAL, BUT OF SECURING THE LAND ROUTE BETWEEN IPOTAVO AND URIZEN, BETWEEN NIKITIS AXOU AND EMPIRE.

ILARCH CARMIA TIPHIONIS,  
OF THE BLOOD OF IPOTAVO, SCION OF TIPHION,  
IPOTAVO,  
AXOS





Sekretariat Kellua Itsepainen  
Of the Sussivari Oathsworn Fyrd  
Imperial Consul

I am writing on behalf of Militärattache Ludkhannah Schöningen, who is responsible for communication with your Empire. Until recently we have been dealing with Merchant-Prince Jonah Yakovitch who styled himself "Trade Emissary". However, this line of communication has proven to not be an effective way to communicate with the Empire.

The reports of merchants describe you as *sekretär des Senats* - that you advise the Senate on international affairs. In the absence of an embassy and a recognised ambassador, die Militärattache has instructed me to cease communication with the "Trade Emissary" and write instead to your office.

You will certainly be aware that our Office of International Trade has assessed additional tariffs on trade with your Empire. There has been some pressure from your people to remove those tariffs, but they will remain in place at least until formal diplomatic relations are established between our nations.

The Commonwealth and the Empire do not agree on numerous topics, but we believed we were united in our belief in the evils of slavery, at the very least. We are extremely concerned about the Empire's refusal to grant formal recognition to the Commonwealth, while granting recognition to the Magician Princes of the Darmish Magocracy. If this state of affairs continue then relations between our nations will deteriorate even further.

We understand that the task of completing our embassy falls to Senator Sermersuaq. Militärattache Ludkhannah suggests strongly that you use whatever influence you may have over this Senator to ensure that work on the embassy is completed sooner, rather than later.

(Im namen von)  
Militärattache Ludkhannah Schöningen,  
die Stahlhalle  
Volkavaar

Kellua Itsepainen of the Sussivari Oathsworn Fyrd, Imperial Consul

I am Edwin Vandesar, and I am writing on the instructions of the bedelaar-huisbaas Vandesar. In your terms, my uncle is a powerful merchant-prince, perhaps on a par with one of your more influential senators.

Your nation has no embassy with the Sarcophan Delves, but we understand that you can relay decisions to us from your government. If we are mistaken, can I ask that you pass this letter to someone who can resolve the offer it contains one way or another?

He understands that you have started work on a loading dock in Sarvos which has been designed especially for unloading and loading shipments of white granite. He further understands that your Senate has decided to refuse trade with the Asaveans before the docks can even be completed.

The Vandesar would like to trade with the Empire, using those docks. They will need to be completed first, of course? This assumes your Senate will give formal permission for us to bring our stone into Imperial waters and unload it at your docks in return for money. We do not want to make assumptions.

You will want the permission of your Senate, and someone will need to be appointed no doubt to deal with the actual purchasing. It is a ministry, in Imperial terms. A minister will need to be responsible, and will be the one that we will deal with if there are problems.

Before we go further though, perhaps you should make sure that your Synod are not going to shut the everything down. Reassure them that we are not a people that has time for slaves and slavers - they require too much upkeep. It is easier to just pay workers a wage and let them feed themselves.

A lot of the white granite we have to sell you has been quarried using the Unfortunates - but surely even your Synod cannot complain about the dead pulling their weight and paying the debts they incurred while alive?

We will commit to make white granite available to you each season as long as we remain at peace, and as long as it remains profitable to us to do so. In writing now I commit that Vandarsar will offer the following deal each season. We will begin by selling you 24 wains of white granite.

The first 8 wains of white granite will cost 32 crowns for each wain.

The next 8 wains of white granite will cost 29 crowns for each wain.

The final 8 wains of white granite will cost 26 crowns for each wain.

If the Empire is consistently taking all of our white granite then we may be prepared to negotiate bringing more in but we are not prepared to do that until we see solid returns. Perhaps after the first year we can renegotiate the situation to bring in more granite?

If you are interested, then send an invisible courier back to me as soon as you can. There is never any shortage of places where we can sell our granite.

If you are not interested, then there is no need for you to reply. We do not need an interpreter to understand silence.

Edwin Vandarsaar,  
Verdronkendijk  
Sarcophan Delves  
Sarcophan

## CHILDREN OF PAPA OTEC

WE HAVE GIVEN SANCTUARY TO THESE TWO TRIBES. THEY ARE FULL OF HATE, AND THOUGHTS OF VENGEANCE, AND IF THEY CANNOT ABANDON THAT HATE THEY WILL NOT FIND A PLACE AMONG US.

WE DO NOT EXPECT PAYMENT FOR HELPING PEOPLE WHO NEED OUR HELP.

YET I ASK THAT IF YOU WANT TO CONTINUE TO KEEP THEM SAFE YOU CONTINUE TO DO WHAT YOU CAN TO HELP THE PEOPLE OF THE BARRENS LIVE FREE OF THE EMPIRE AND THE DRUGS.

THE GREAT FOREST AND THE BLACK WIND WILL NOT STOP UNTIL THE BARRENS IS WHOLE AGAIN, UNTIL THE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS ARE DRIVEN OUT.

THE ORCS NEED ALLIES - AND THEY HAVE FOUND POOR ONES. BE WARNED THAT THE GRENDAL, HAVE BROUGHT SHIPS TO THE BARREN SEA, WITH DIPLOMATS, AND GIFTS OF WEAPONS AND ARMOUR FOR THE TRIBES. THEY WILL USE THE ORCS AS A WEAPON AGAINST THE EMPIRE BUT AS IT STANDS RIGHT NOW, THE TRIBES NEED FRIENDS MORE THAN THEY NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THE TRUE AGENDA OF THOSE WHO COME WITH FRIENDLY FACES.

SOME OF THE GREAT FOREST THINK THEY CAN FIND ALLIES AMONG THE NAVARR, AND THEY MAY MAKE BETTER FRIENDS. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFLUENCE, I ASK YOU TO CONSIDER HELPING THEM TO REACH AN HONEST ACCORD.

COLVUN

DOURFELL KEEP, HOPE'S REST, THE BARRENS