

My dear Barachel -
or his heir -

I hope my letter finds you well - I apologise for not writing sooner - I have been rushed off my feet, and find myself rather a victim of our success. I hope that my correspondence does not find you insuperably busy: once again I require your assistance, and I can only hope I do not ask too much. I feel confident that your word would bear greater weight than mine: please allow me to explain from the beginning.

Dropping your name and that of the Diepenbeek household has allowed us through doors we couldn't have dreamed of, and saw a proper effort undertaken to provide us with improved access to our site. Work is so much easier when our people have the assistance of a proper support structure, and consolidating our work allowed us to conserve liao in excellent fashion while not slackening our pace, for one need not be anointed while working in a consecrated building. It was novel to see prices suddenly drop, rather than rise, when it was known who we were: not to mention that when the subject of magicians was carefully broached, they were on our doorstep not a week later. And I must thank Caleb in particular for allowing me truthfully to say that I had an Imperial coven willing to work for me for a pittance if a deal could not be struck - the bargain we got for the magic would have to be seen to be believed, if I say so myself.

As to whether our actions were forbidden - this is Sarcophan! Success is never forbidden! A factor from the Diepenbeeks visited our little shrine and proclaimed himself inspired: upon his advice they put their hand in their pocket and the masons were in the following week: within a season our shrine boasted the finest reliquary one did ever see. Already attendance is improved, and there is talk of consecrating one of the newly opened upper chambers to Prosperity and filling it with devotional art: the additional liao required should quite pay for itself in donations.

We were pleased to host a visit from the Wayfarer Damien of Fearghus' Claim, who stood before the sarcophagus - now surmounted with a statue of its occupant - and preached of the Ambition of Thrace and the Bonewall orcs he inspired to change the Doctrines of the Way. Thrace will likely never be our most well understood Exemplar, but it is a source of Pride to us that the Way of Virtue continues to lead the world in spiritual progress - and I have commissioned my sister to illustrate for us an icon of Thrace to take place beside our icons of Ademar and Atuman. We hear of a new figure emerging in Highguard, the First Empress Reborn, a living Paragon of Courage? We should love to hear of her. When can we expect a primer upon her teachings?

To matters of archaeology. The tomb served, as we thought, another purpose before it was sealed. The magicians saw in their orb an array of servants tending to the needs of what must have been our horse: and they saw a tall woman with a warrior's physique, copper of skin, dark of hair, who wore a pendant of weltsilver, who must have been the horse's partner. Her fine robes of grey would mark her out as a person of true wealth today, but it is anyone's guess what they meant to her contemporaries. In an upstairs chamber the magicians witnessed what seemed to be meetings of a council, coven or sect; in another we believe that there was once a series of signs inlaid in weltsilver, of which more in a moment.

The tombs of old Sarcophan are, as we know, almost mis-named. The last generation to live there are thought to have hoarded their wealth, sealed their homes from the inside, laid their curses, primed their traps, and laid their dead within them - what I am getting at is that tombs have bodies in. But the only body within our entire tomb is that of a horse - and a mummy, at that, laid to rest with care and reverence. And tombs have treasure in. But the only material wealth that we have found within this tomb has been literally inlaid into the very walls. Or perhaps we were wrong about the purpose of this place - but such a large and palatial place on what must once have been extremely expensive land, and especially given the white granite that went into its construction, one cannot believe that nobody but the horse was permitted to live here. Not even the Beggars can afford to waste space like that in Sarcophan.

You have access to scholars I do not, so please correct me if I am over-eager: but I believe that there are only a few viable conclusions. Either the histories of the Tomb-Banquet are exaggerated, and it was not so common to leave grave-goods as the Beggars have led us to believe - or the people of Parralenth were a distinct caste who did not treat their tombs in the same way as both the ancient and modern Sarcophan - or we have truly uncovered the home of one of your people's own very ancestors, who when they left our shores would surely have taken their wealth with them!

And here, then, began the disagreement. Our local shareholders, the Diepenbeeks, sat and listened to the tale as I have told it above, and came to the place and saw it for themselves, and within that Consecrated space they too proclaimed themselves inspired.

This was clearly, they said, the tomb of the horse of Atun the Navigator herself. With the attendance that we have, and with the reach that comes with the assistance of one of the Beggars themselves, they proposed a new development - a shrine of pilgrimage that would dwarf our current congregation. A few moments' work with an abacus, discussing a modest price of admission and some sensible estimates for traffic, and the numbers quickly became eyewatering. Enough for half of my best people to retire on! Enough to fund my next venture, and then some!

But when the factor had left, and the spell of their words had been broken, we began to realise the implications of what they had said. The drawings they quickly sketched - they are both Ambitious and feasible, without doubt, but they will require the replacement nine-tenths of the existing structure. Whoever's tomb this truly is - in the process of creating a shrine to the memory of the Navigators, it will be destroyed! The inscriptions and inlays that we are only just beginning to restore would be entirely ripped out. The upper rooms that once sheltered an organisation that we do not yet understand would be converted into storehouses and kitchens. The vestibule where we painstakingly disarmed and retained the original traps this spring would be converted into a place for the sale of devotional icons.

And what do we receive, in return for all this destruction? What do you receive, who provided the springboard for my Ambition? Why, the stewardship of a highly profitable shrine of pilgrimage. The estimates are that your share would be a little over fifty rings a season, and we foresee that income lasting as long as your ports are open to our vessels and ours are open to Wayists of any stripe.

I do not want my best people to retire - I want them to continue to explore with me, and find further wonders. I do not want my sister to spend her days selling devotional art to the wealthy - I want her working with me on reconstructing history. Yes, I want to die rich - everyone does - but to me, this price is too high. This is not my idea of Prosperity, and it is not by my lights Wisdom, and it is not my own Ambition. But Hadrian Diepenbeek and his people do not see it that way. This place is not a rich enough vein of relics for them - they stand before our jewel and see it only as a pilgrimage destination with an underdeveloped site.

Lean on them for me. Convince them otherwise, and I will work as fast as I can to provide you the fruits of the knowledge this place has to offer.

Or don't, and enjoy your throne and a quarter a year, and my tomb-raiders shall enjoy their newfound wealth, and I shall try to enjoy my wealthy patron and new enterprises.

And may we all choke on it.

Klaus von Sarcophan

The Congregation of the Horse