

Cover Note

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Enclosed documents

Report from Agent Couros, Nemoria (Asavean Archipelago)

Report from Agent Umshalla, Sarcophan Delves (Sarcophan)

Report from Agent Vassa, Robc (Iron Confederacy)

Report from Agent Scorrero, City of Jarm (Jarmish Principalities)

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In each case, reports are compiled by local agent-handler (per code name) and dispatched by winged messenger.

Report compiled by Estéban i Feducci i Riqueza

Spring 380YE

Report from Asavean agents

Synopsis: Following Senate motion, piracy by Imperial nations has declined completely. Senate decision to embargo trade has angered some Plenum families. Swift repeal has cemented Asavean suspicions that this is due to ongoing problems with Imperial Synod rather than Senate concern.

Result: Plenum largely remains pro-Empire. Tarquinius family powerful and influential – and angry – but difficult to appraise extent of influence. If Empire remains well inclined to rest of Empire, likely to see continued good relations.

Commentary: Asavean domestic problems continue to develop. Rebellion has broken out in one of their satrapies.

The more reactionary Plenum households agree that the root of their problems continues to lie the practice of the Way among those who object to traditional Asavean society. Nemoria has been largely untouched by these problems – but it is interesting that several politically influential priests are championing an opportunity for the Empire to bring the Way to Nemoria when they have always actively and enthusiastically opposed any attempt to. Our agents cannot be certain, but they suspect that part of their motivation may be to attempt to learn more about the Way with an eye to uncovering weaknesses in its philosophy that they may be able to exploit, or even to attempt to subvert the teachings of the virtues to support the Asavean hegemony.

The Plenum as a body, however, is very happy with the Empire. Several smaller Plenum families are seeing opportunities to take advantage of the failures of the Tarquinius to engage in trade with their Imperial counterparts.

In particular, the Heraclien and Rangabe families – rivals to the Tarquins – have expressed interest in arranging a contract to provide white granite to the Empire. They do not have the resources of the Tarquins ... but our agents suspect they will be a good deal less picky about the details of the trade than the Tarquins. Furthermore, a minor house called the Jiuvianna have expressed an interest in a permanent trade route dealing in orichalcum – in return for a grant of land and the construction of a compound for their exclusive use.

Lady Madrianna of the Blue stones is serving as go-between on both deals – she appears to be actively seeking opportunities to strengthen trade ties with the Asaveans – so it is likely the Ambassador will know more.

Relations with the Sumaah Republic appear to have reached something of a plateau (if that is a suitable metaphor for the deep abyss into which Republic-Archipelago relations has long since tumbled). Surprisingly, the Sumaah have not engaged in open warfare – our agents surmise that they may be focusing some of their efforts on their war with the Empire although what form that effort is taking beyond angry missionaries is unclear.

Report compiled by Agent Couros Nemoria Asavean Archipelago 380 YE

Report from Sarcophan

Sarcophan remains the only one of the five major nations abroad that the Empire does not have a formal ambassador with. Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike, who advises the Great Table on matters of foreign trade has continued to express her opinion that the Empire considers Sarcophan beneath their notice, and some of the seats at the Beggar's Banquet share her opinion, but for the most part they appear unconcerned. However, while the Empire keeps Sarcophan at arms' length other nations are benefitting from more profitable relations – including the orcs of the Broken Shore. The Grendel have recently received permission to open a small embassy in Sarcophan and are negotiating trade in mithril in return for weirwood.

It is unlikely that the cynical and pragmatic Bedelaar Huisbaas will close the Delves to anyone – it's not in their interests – but the presence of Grendel vessels in their waters may make life difficult for Imperial vessels. As long as no nation trading in Sarcophan damages trade too seriously, the Sarcophan turn a blind eye to piracy or ship-theft that takes place out of sight of their port.

Furthermore, the Axou have continued to ingratiate themselves with Sarcophan. There are regular fleets of black sailed ships now from all four of the Axos citadels. They trade herbs, grave goods, beggar's lye, and several rare narcotic concoctions that appear quite popular here in the Delves. Like the Grendel, the Axou have an Embassy here and the ambassador from the Towers of Kantor is a regular guest at their great feasts. The woman does not conceal her opinion that the Empire is arrogant and condescending, and when she speaks of Imperial snottiness, people listen.

At the moment there is a reasonable amount of trade, which keeps all save the most proud reasonably happy. Status quo is restored and shows little sign of deteriorating ... but if anything is done to anger the Delves our agents predict that the situation could deteriorate extremely quickly. It would be a good idea not to let that situation change.

One potential fly in the ointment is the efforts of the Sumaah to destroy the reputation of the Imperial Synod. While there are not a great many followers of the Way in the Delves, they do exist and until recently they have looked to Bastion for guidance in their faith. With the open schism between the Empire and Sumaah, however, the matter is less clear cut. The real risk here in the opinion of our more theologically inclined agents is that the confusion will simply drive Pilgrims away from the faith altogether and into the arms of one of the many other religions that offer their wares on the docks of Sarcophan.

Report compiled by agent Umshalla The Delves Sarcophan 380YE

The Principalities of Jarm

You will probably know by now that the Princes of Jarm have agreed to remove the embargo on the sale of crystal mana to imperial citizens following formal apologies. This is of course excellent news. There are still some minor obstacles to normal trade being resumed, but from discussions with those in the know it is likely that the Princes will turn their attention elsewhere soon enough – and that as soon as they lose interest in persecuting Imperial captains Anton Trescher will simply make those obstacles disappear. He is nothing if not a pragmatist where international trade is concerned.

Politics here are *extremely* volatile thanks to the establishment of Rigia and the Eastern Alliance as a factor in Jarmish politics. For centuries they have been the underdogs, seen as provincial fools by the Northern and Southern Princes. The success of Barbara Radz and her “neice” Eriktho Auricspire in supporting Rigia has certainly set the angry *similodar* among the *elephanti*.

There is a lot of talk about slave trade between the eastern Jarmish and the Empire but in truth nobody important really believes this is what is happening. They are aware of the details of the agreement, it just suits some of the more petty Princes to undermine the reputation of the Empire in this way.

However, the Ragian deal is not without significant implications for the Empire. The majority of slaves in Jarm are *not* orcs. For every orc slave there are a hundred human slaves. Most of the orc slaves are found in the east ... because the eastern principalities border orcish wildlands. Now that the Empire appears to be offering mithril for orc slaves, several of the eastern houses – especially the impoverished Yulmadel and the **Grabitel** families have more contact with orcen tribes than many of their peers ... and are openly discussing launching raids into the lands of the barbarians to capture more slaves if they can be sold to Duke Ferrero.

Commonwealth Report

Following the completion of the Commonwealth embassy in Siroc, an Imperial embassy has been established in the port of Leerdam. A staff of civil servants have already taken up residence, and are negotiating a reduction in red-tape where Imperial imports and exports are concerned.

Despite the formal opening of diplomatic relations, attitudes to the Empire remain cool. The fact that one of our major trading partners appear to be the slave-owning tyrants of Asavea is bad enough, but the fact our other main political ally on the world stage appears to the Jarm is a matter of great concern for these people.

Something that is complicating our relations is the unclear attitude of the Empire to slavery. I must confess I was surprised to hear that we were openly buying slaves from Jarm, even if the intention is to free them when they reach Imperial shores. To many Commonwealth citizens this is a problematic decision – they would much rather see slaves achieve their own liberty in their own homes with the aid of external allies. That said, all but the most rabid abolitionist must realise that the Empire cannot provide military aid to Jarmish slave populations given the distances involved.

In our opinion, an unequivocal statements denouncing the institution from the Imperial Synod, Conclave, or Senate will help our position here – although of course it may well damage our relation with Jarm and Asavea, of course.

A significant development you must be aware of is that the supply of crystal mana in the western Commonwealth port of Volkavaar has dried up. Our agents have been unable to get a definitive answer as to why ... but our estimation is that the crystals are being stockpiled for a new campaign to expand Commonwealth borders – into an area that will bring them into direct conflict with Jarmish interests.

However, following a relaxation of certain laws, the Commonwealth is being much more free with their proprietary invention of artisan's oil. Imperial captains should be able to pick it up cheaply on the docks here, which will probably help with the war effort at home.

Report compiled by Agent Gancio,
Port-city of Leerdam
Commonwealth

AXOS

I hope you will bear with me in regard to this report – we are still establishing our networks of agents and sorting through the complex and often contradictory attitudes of the Axou to the Empire.

We are establishing our presence in the Towers of Kantor, which is in the south-east of the Axou nation. You must understand that almost the entire population of the nation lives in four sprawling cities which they call “citadels.” Kantor is one of the most civilised – almost as pleasant an environment as Tassato – and a centre for trade with the rest of the world. Many black-sailed ships sail from Kantor, especially to Jarm and Sarcophan.

The leaders of the people of Kantor are somewhat interested in trade with the Empire – but they are not prepared to beg. They are waiting for someone to approach them with an offer. Specifically, they are prepared to arrange access to the docks of Kantor in return for similar concessions in the Empire and the creation of an Embassy. Of possibly interest to Imperial traders is that a common “trade good” in Axos is crystal mana – this could present a source of this valuable substance significantly closer to home than distant Axos.

The other three citadels are only peripherally allied with Kantor. The citadel of Maykop engages in little foreign trade, being largely focused on the nation as a whole. Maykop is where they have their great university of the necromantia, and their largest temples to their grim and bitter heretical faith of immortality and spectres.

The people of Issyk appear to be actively critical or, and opposed to, the Empire. They are apparently still smarting over their treatment by Imperial citizens during the visit to Anvil of their diplomats a few years ago. I have not confirmed the rumours, but it appears that Issyk has accepted an embassy of the Grendel orcs – although in doing so they have apparently outraged the sensibilities of their neighbours.

The people of Ipotavo are actively impressed with, and friendly to, the Empire. Unfortunately, they have little access to the sea and so it would be unlikely we could open direct contact with them. They are in favour of, and supporting, improved trade. If the Empire were to create an embassy, in addition to the economic considerations it would allow us an easier access to a populace that views Imperial troops as allies who saved them from the Druj hordes.

According to rumours, the Tunnels of Kaban were recently destroyed during the campaign against the Druj. The surviving inhabitants appear to have been scattered to the other cities.

Of possible interest is the attitude of the Axou to slavery. They frown on the practice but it is not actively illegal ... but people who keep slaves are seen as uncivilised. We strongly suspect that if the Empire were to gain the confidence of Maykop and Kantor, the practice could be effectively outlawed here without noticeably damaging their society or economy.

The Axou will not tolerate trade envoys, but if the Imperial Consul or a legitimate Ambassador wished they could offer the hand of friendship to the Axou by contacting larch Maxatios of the Towers of Kantor.

Report compiled by Agent Nepenthe

Towers of Kantor

Iron Confederacy

We have established a presence in the port of Robec in the south-western Iron Confederacy. The Suranni are not proving to be especially friendly, making our work extremely difficult. In truth one of the main problems is that the Suranni are not familiar enough with Imperial citizens – we stand out here like sore thumbs making information gathering difficult.

The Suranni are extremely critical of the Empire due to our “drug crazed religion” and our reliance on the “boons of Dumon” – which is their God of Evil and Magic. Diplomatic relations are further hampered by the way that the Suranni assume that we are ourselves witches, or crazed zealots. Anyone dealing with us also comes under suspicion.

I have no real suggestions as to how to improve relations further, but at least we have an Embassy.

One possibility lies with improving the attitude of mistress Jeanne de Hibernat, who is the High Priestess of Evra the Smith. Her Temple of Iron Hammers dominates the skyline of Robec, and with her approval we may well be able to get the docks of Robec opened to friendly Imperial shipping – she wields as much influence as one of the Ducal families, and above all else she desires white granite. The Suranni build their temples from white granite, but the nobles are clearly restricting access to this valuable material from the priesthood in an obvious attempt to reduce their power. Contact could be established with Jeanne to discuss trade in white granite and a good enough deal might be sufficient to ensure her support for Imperial interests in the Iron Confederacy.

The Suranni now have a land border with the Empire, of course, so ground trade is likely to be more effective, but opening the port will help us establish our presence in Robec more quickly. Of possible interest to the Empire are rumours that the Grendel orcs in some manner spirited the Naguerro clan orcs – including their entire army – away from the Iron Confederacy armies. If they have done so, they have gained a significant military advantage.

It must be noted that the Iron Confederacy despise all orcs, and the Grendel above others. With this in mind I suggest any diplomatic relations with the Suranni come from humans, ideally naga (the bloodline is seen as divinely touched), and never from magicians, priests, or orcs.

I would go further – it is vitally important that the Suranni never discover that the ambassador is a magician or a priest of the way – if they do it will be a significant diplomatic incident.

Agent Serpes
Robec
Iron Confederacy

Faraden

The Faraden have no ports – they have a deathly fear of the sea. While Imperial merchants are not unknown, we still stand out a little. We have been attempting to find a suitable location to set up our base of operations with minimal success.

This land is a mess of alliances and rivalries – as you may imagine in a land where Vengeance is enshrined as a virtue and where Wisdom and Ambition are seen as vices.

The Faraden are absolutely interested in closer trade ties with the Empire – and have secured a treaty with the Jotun allowing them to pass unmolested through the Lasambrian Hills (which is more than they achieved with the previous residents!) In part this was due to Imperial military intervention in the closing days of the Jotun campaign in northern Faraden – and this has stood the Empire in good stead with the merchants at least.

However, a significant impediment to Imperial relations with Faraden comes in the shape of the fate which befell the eldest child – and presumed successor – of General Ogudai, Marad, during a visit to Anvil. Marad was extremely popular, and General Ogudai is one of the most influential military figures in modern Faraden. The General refuses to even consider contact with the Empire until the people he deems responsible for his son's disaster are executed and their heads or skins sent to him. This is problematic because in a culture where vengeance has such a prominent place those houses who might be more open to relations with us must maintain a low profile or risk suffering the judgement of the Ogudai as allies of the Empire.

One opportunity presents itself however – if I may offer advice. While the Faraden hate and fear the sea they are above all other things pragmatic traders. While they have no settlements on the shore I believe that if the Empire requested it they could secure permission to construct a small port on their north-eastern coast. If this were the case, fleets would be able to trade with Faraden directly. This is likely to be more useful to the Marchers and the folk of Wintermark – who have access to the Gullet – but could offer a serious opportunity for prosperity.

The Faraden themselves are focused on land trade routes – but we know that they are especially interested in the food of the Marches, the ores of Varushka, and the fine wines of Dawn in particular. Faraden enclaves in these nations could spread prosperity across entire territories, especially for farm and mine owners, as well as improving Imperial–Faraden relations.

Agent Alephan

Town of Junon, Faraden