

*This letter is for the eyes of Tyburn Weaver of House de Rondell, Grandmaster of the Shattered Lantern. If you are not the aforementioned person, please stop reading this now. Thankyou.*

*We have carried out your instructions. When you told us to arrange for a dead body to be found, we were prepared to take drastic measures. Fortunately this did not prove necessary. We were lucky enough to locate the body of a Grey Pilgrim who had slipped on a mountain path and died of a broken neck. Lying in a snowdrift had kept the body preserved. We were able to procure appropriately sized clothing and create the documents and assorted trinkets that would add plausibility to the story we wished to tell. We deposited the body under cover of night just downwind of a patrol route used by the Spire of Black Glass. A sharp-eyed operative was able to observe as the patrolling sentinels found the body, just as planned.*

*While we have withdrawn our operatives who were contacting the Spire due to the intense risk to life and limb, we have been able to observe certain things. The Spire has ceased all external patrols since finding the body. They have increased the number of Sentinels on watch at the walls. They appear to have redoubled their already punishing routine of martial drilling. While they have not yet acted, they seem to be taking the threat seriously. I shall update you as soon as possible if anything changes dramatically.*

*There is another thing that has occupied us. The Grey Pilgrim we found was probably called Noam, formerly of Virtue's Rest, assuming that the journal on their person was theirs. They had one child from a since-ended marriage. Entries in this journal spoke of struggling to maintain sobriety while isolated on the road, and of the great sense of purpose that pilgrimage gave them. They wrote a foreword in the journal, offering words of guidance for the children of their Chapter who might read this once they were gone.*

We have been debating for some time what to do with this journal. Several Highborn operatives who have previously been admirably pragmatic in the exercise of their Vigilance got cold feet upon learning of this journal. We understand that their people have a strong interest in preserving the writings of the virtuous, particularly accounts of travel. I gave orders that this journal was not to be returned to the Pilgrim's former Chapter without express orders to do so – the chances of someone slipping and giving the game away are, in my estimation, unacceptably high. However, several people have raised concerns that due to our actions, we may run the risk of a ghost arising. If such a ghost were to be anchored to the journal then we might be able to exorcise it and keep the situation under control, but such things are unpredictable at the best of times. My inclination is to burn the damn thing and compel the silence of our squeamish Highborn by whatever means are available within the law. However, I am aware that I am sometimes wrong. As such, I leave the matter to you. What are we to do with the personal effects of our body donor? If we do return them, what cover story should we use? If we do not, how do we maintain our operational security?

Neirin Light-And-Shadow

*To the Honourable and Virtuous Avisena i Kharizmi i Guerra,*

*I cannot say much, but you will doubtless have heard of the negotiators coming to Anvil. I know how fast news travels in your Empire. What I will say is this: they are coming in good faith. You will not like what they are asking for - it is more Ambitious than anything we have yet proposed. However, you may like what they are offering. Bring people to meet them who are genuinely interested in negotiation. They will not be able to accept a counter-offer on the spot, that will need to be returned to the leaders of our people, but if our initial offer is accepted then we will be able to begin acting on our offers immediately. If everything goes well, who knows? Your role as unofficial Ambassador may soon acquire the legitimacy it deserves!*

*So you know a little more of who to expect, we will be sending three people. Our chief negotiator will be Esperanza Blade-Binder of the Hierro. She is a level-headed woman and comes prepared for the back-and-forth of the negotiating table. Reyes Aguilar of the Corazon will be there to confirm any military details that may become relevant. She is bold and prone to making rash promises when the mood strikes her, but her Courage and Prosperity are undeniable. She loves Corsairs, and will doubtless be happy to speak to any who may join us. Double-check any offers she makes with Esperanza. Lastly, Pastor Imanol of the Escuta will be there to discuss matters of religion with anyone who may be interested. He is a profoundly spiritual man, and has little interest in the substance of the negotiations. He simply wishes to debate matters of faith and Virtue with Imperial Priests.*

*To other business. You asked what the significance of controlling a White Granite quarry is. Let me offer some context. When the Jotun invaded Reinos, one of the first things they conquered was a quarry in the north. This was assigned to a trusted Jarl,*

*as is the custom of their people. When we returned to our homes and accepted the Choice of the Jotun, we asked if the quarry could be returned to us. The Jarl-of-Jarls, Gudmundr Arason, acted as if we had made some childish mistake and asked the other Jarls present to forgive our presumption. The Jotun had taken the quarry by right of conquest, and to rob a warrior of what they had claimed in warfare would be deeply disrespectful. Now the stone from the quarry goes to further fortifying the territories of our fellow Jotun. I will not pretend that I am happy about this.*

*You also mentioned the 'council of Jarls'. This is a difficult business. The governing structures of the Jotun are not complicated, but they are complex. Technically speaking, every Jarl has dominion over the lands that they call their own and their word cannot be gainsaid by any save the Jarl-of-Jarls. Many within the Jotun pride themselves on having a simpler and more direct leadership structure than the endlessly multiplying houses of government of the Empire. They are, of course, wrong. Such a simplistic structure of government cannot account for all the complexities of running a nation. As such, informal networks of power and influence have arisen to fill in the gaps. This Jarl's lands are small but produce fierce warriors, so they have influence in matters of war. This Jarl's lands are rich in resources, so they have influence in matters of economics. Another Jarl is a close personal friend to the Jarl-of-Jarls and speaks advice in their ear, while their lands are left in the trust of a neighbouring Jarl whose influence is further compounded by being put in such a position of trust, but who is resented by their fellows who grumble about the lack of honour in political games that they know they cannot win. Then you get wily old wolves like Ustigar in the north, who could never overrule the Jarl-of-Jarls but who might end up getting what they want almost every time by being very careful what fights they pick and with whom. The Jotun seem simple from the outside, but their rivalries and alliances are as storied as those of the hill clans of Kahraman.*

*I am rambling again. Would getting the White Granite quarry give us influence? That's putting the cart before the ox. We would need influence to even consider being given the quarry, influence that we simply do not possess. We certainly do not have the respect accorded to Jarl Geir who currently oversees it, a hard-headed old bastard who proudly bears the title of 'The Goat'. He is disinclined towards compromise, and would take any attempt to rob him of the spoils of war very badly.*

*Our negotiators may be able to answer any further questions you have. I urge you, hear them out and bring people who are prepared to put in the work. This could signal a new dawn for both our people.*

*Virtue Guide You,*

*Lucero Mithril-Shield of the Hierro*

*Ashborn Trosk,*

*It is finally done. My power over the City of Locks is cemented. At last, I am Basileus-Elect. The Lictors will confirm this at their forthcoming Plenipotentiary. By the beginning of the next season by your reckoning, I will begin the work of ruling. However, there is one last item of business to be concluded. A secret ceremony. I offer you and*

*THIS LETTER COMMANDEERED BY ORDER OF THE CITY OF BOND AND BAR*

*THE BASILEUS-ELECT IS CORRECT THAT A CEREMONY WILL OCCUR BUT IS INCORRECT ABOUT WHAT IS REQUIRED.*

*YOU, ASHBORN TROSK, MUST ATTEND THE IMPERIAL REGIO AT 10.55 ON SATURDAY OF THE FORTHCOMING SUMMIT. YOU WILL BRING WITH YOU FIVE PEOPLE, ALL OF WHOM HAVE STRONG OPINIONS ON POWER. ONE MUST BE CONCERNED WITH THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE. ONE WITH THE POWER OF COMMERCE. ONE WITH THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS. ONE WITH THE POWER OF PERSUASION. ONE WITH THE POWER OF VIOLENCE. NONE MUST HOLD FORMAL OFFICE IN YOUR EMPIRE. IT MAY BENEFIT YOU IF THEY ARE LESS EXPERIENCED THAN YOU IN MATTERS OF INTRIQUE.*

*A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CITY OF BOND AND BAR WILL MEET YOU AT THE APPOINTED TIME AND CONVEY YOU TO A CHAMBER. YOUR SAFE AND TIMELY RETURN IS GUARANTEED.*

*shall appreciate the culmination of our work together.*

*Regards,*

*Basileus-Elect Brazen*

*My Dear Friends,*

*I'm coming to Anvil again and I hope we can meet.*

*I can't tell you how happy the Horned Hare was with the just rewards you meted out to the Butcher of The Barrens. Visiting Cruelty upon the Cruel is just in Their eyes. When next we meet we will have to speak about it further. Do they know why they have been cursed? Anyway, I'm getting beyond myself in my excitement. I'm going to come to Anvil again for the Summer Solstice and I was hoping to avail myself of the courtesy of your hall once more. I should be reaching Yrkara Hall at about 8.30pm. I have some just rewards for yourselves. I also think we should discuss ways we can get in touch more easily.*

*We need to talk about others who need taking down a peg or two. Since you are close to the movers and shakers, being at Anvil, you can do a lot for the movement. As well as this, you can gather information for us. We can talk more about this face to face.*

*Yours in defence of the Helpless*

*Savio*