



Report on the Activities of Bas Celik

*Compiled and Edited by The Speaker and his Apprentice
On the Eve of Winter 337YF*

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Our Conjecture

It is our conjecture that Bas Celik is attempting to form a second Empire, possibly with a resurrected Alderei the Fair at the helm.

This empire could be composed of Barbarians. At the very least, it is evident that she has been working with the Thule. If Bas Celik kills the sovereign in Karsk that is attacking the Thule, it would provide further confirmation.

Whilst no one sits on the Empire's throne, it is possible that the magics required for Bas Celik to create her own Empire might be easier to control and manipulate; it might even be possible to subvert the magic of the civil service and Egregores if the right rituals were performed. We believe the longer we delay in selecting an Emperor, the stronger her position becomes, but we realise how extravagant a claim that must seem.

We are also concerned that she is attempting to destroy all the Sovereigns in Varushka. Although this sounds like a boon, it would destabilise the fragile balance between wolves and villagers. Without Sovereigns to keep them at bay, and with Varushkan schiacta and wardens stretched to their limit, the Volodny may step in to fill the vacuum. Many vales may turn to them and away from the Empire in their desperation.

The rest of this report provides support for this conjecture, and includes accounts, both recent and ancient, of the Empire's dealings with the Volodny. Included in the Appendix is all the lore that could be gathered in the time we had available.

Head and Crown of an Empress

Britta was killed on campaign a month before the Winter equinox of 376 YE, in battle against the Thule barbarians in Skarsind. When her body was recovered her head and crown were missing.

The location of the crown was obtained and a League strike force assembled to obtain it. It was guarded by a Thule war-band who were trying to transport it to Bas Celik.

Although the crown was found, the head it was on was not that of Britta. Her head was still missing. That came into the possession of Bas Celik. (Someone reported that she said the crown was worthless, but the head of the Empress had let her know everything she needed).

The Ritual

A ritual was performed on the crown to see who had worn it in the past. Apparently, Bas Celik had worn it two times previously - once over 150 years ago, and then again after the Empress was killed.

Theft

According to words spoken, the head of the Empress was in fact rescued along with the crown, but was subsequently stolen from the camp at Anvil.

Stag Hunt

Wise Woman's Account

We had gone on a wedding quest for the stag, to the vale of his betrothed, to find the pieces of a rainbow so that he could prove his love for his bride to be. Unfortunately, we seemed to arrive somewhere completely different, and were greeted by an entity claiming to be Bas Celik, who stated that we were on her territory.

We tried to continue on our way, and not engage the Sovereign in conversation, as we had no course with her at this time, however she started screaming and threatening us if we "dared to continue through her lands further". We therefore decided that, clearly something was amiss and we were best to return to Anvil.

The sovereign tried to engage us in conversation, and asked members of the group what desires she could grant. We all kept silent counsel. She continued. At one point, someone flippantly said "the only thing I desire is the death of ALL sovereigns, can you grant that" - at which point she giggled hysterically and manically, and proclaimed "oh you desire to cause war amongst the Volodny" we explained patiently that this was NOT what had been stated.

I surmised and stated clearly that "no deal had been made and we were leaving, and walked away with most of the group following. My most senior apprentice, stayed 'til all had left to make sure no one made any deals.

I believe that after this some other Varuskans were informed later on by this Sovereign that we had requested of Bas Celik that she murdered other sovereigns. I can categorically state that this was not the case. We now have a sovereign being a sovereign and twisting the facts to its own end, and attempting to cause dissent in the nation.

The fact that we appear to have some citizens who would believe the word of a sovereign over that of a wise one, pains me greatly, and is something I intend to address at the next equinox meeting at Anvil.

Stag's (Of Triosk?) Account

The stag does not know exactly where the portal took them to; they were supposed to be traveling to Miekarova.

Bas Celik, a very pale, and tall woman dressed like a Boyar and wielding a huge wand, probably made of bone, told them she wanted to give Varushka (and specifically Varushka) the "power of the Volodny" because Varushka had given her Empress Britta's Head.

She offered them power, but the stag said no. She wouldn't go away, but instead repeated that she would give them power if they kneeled before her. They refused so she asked if she could do anything else for them. They asked her to destroy herself, but she said that was something she was unable to do. They were openly defiant, & the stag declared his name to defend himself, and he thinks that is how she came to learn of it.

Other Accounts

I recall being told by one of the members of the Stag Hunt that Bas Celik had offered to cut out their heart and make them an immortal Volodny.

The End of the White Tree

A villager had come to Anvil to ask assistance with wolf attacks against his vale. He arrived whilst the Egregore was holding open a portal for the mission to Sepul. He told us that his village had for a long time had an agreement with a local Sovereign - (a white tree?) This Sovereign kept the wolves in the forests at bay but demanded a sacrifice. This took two forms, every x a sacrifice of (beer?) was required, but after y years a blood sacrifice would be needed instead. (Always an elderly member of the vale was chosen and their sacrifice made it possible for the other villagers to survive?) But this time, when the sacrifice of (beer?) was required, the sovereign demanded one of blood, and moreover, the person to be sacrificed was the young wife of our visitor.

After telling his tale, the visitor left and went to the Senate, and somehow he was able to get news from his vale - it was bad: the village was under attack by wolves. The Sovereign was no longer keeping them at bay. Suspicious of the story that this villager told, we had him checked out by a priest, but he had no auras upon him.

During his time with us, the mission to Sepul had returned and we heard the news of Bas Celik's actions, we had also heard what had passed between Lief and Bas Celik. Perhaps our minds jumped to an unwarranted conclusion - that Bas Celik was killing all the Sovereigns in Varushka? Only time will tell, but the Winter is the Volodny's time not ours.

Needless to say, whatever the actions of Bas Celik, we were unable to help the villager or his people - it would not be possible to open a portal in time to save them. The villager was distraught, and all felt the inevitable deaths upon our consciences. With that the villager ran off into the night.

Bell of Essk

In the town of Essk at the junction of the roads to Karsk, Miekarova and Karov, there is a high tower with a huge bell that was forged by the smiths of Wintermark. When it rings, it can be heard for miles, but it only sounds when a Sovereign arises. On Saturday afternoon, the bells rang out louder than they have done for generations, and according to the Egregore who felt its call, the Sovereign that arose was Bas Celik!

Mission to Capture and Execute Sepul the Cruel

Prelude

Sepul the Cruel, also known as Iron Gallows, was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death by the Wise Council of Varushka.

A Wise One was sent as a representative of the council to deliver the warrant and if necessary carry out the sentence. He was assisted by the General, whose responsibility it was to execute the logistics of the mission.

Along with the many warriors and heroes of Varushka, they were assisted by a group of Navaar under a mercenary banner (lent to them by the Eagles of Gnijezdo) who's striding had been decimated by Sepul. In all, 20 were sent on the mission.

The Mission

The Egregore opened¹ a portal to Sepul's Vale in Miekarova and the heroes stepped through. They reached Sepul's lair without incident. Once there, they encountered enslaved souls that attacked them at Sepul's bidding. The assault continued for a short while until from in amongst the enemy appeared a tall young lady, with pale skin and whose distinguishing feature was a tattoo of a teardrop beneath her eye.

The lady attacked Sepul and within a very short time he had been vanquished. It was at this point the Wise One realised that she could be none other than the Voldny Bas Celik. Being aware of the importance of this discovery and returning safely alive to relay it, he told those with him to disengage.

Bas Celik commanded Sepul's creatures to back away and they cowered behind her. The Wise One called her by name and then stepped forward to speak. Unsure of her intentions, he thanked her for killing an enemy of Varushka, and asked for her leave to return home. Bas Celik replied, "You may leave, but tell your people, tell your Empire - I am here!"

Aftermath

The Navarr guided them back through the forests to the path and the portal back to Anvil, and upon returning, the Wise One went straight to address the Senate.

Note - given me by a member of party

Bas Celik announced that she was executing the sovereign at the request of someone from Triosk. When we asked if captured souls could return to the Labyrinth, she said "No!" When we left she said to the souls "I release you ... from this tree."

¹ The Wise One believes it may have been the Navarr Egregore who opened the portal and that our Egregore made a comment about not arriving where they expected, although his memory is hazy.

Hidden Hearts - a Letter

As I was gathering the last of my belongings one of the Navarr, who spoke to us about Iron Gallows, came and found me. We spoke briefly, but he mentioned that in their dealings with Sadogua's Heralds mention was made of a hidden heart and that knowledge of its location might be available. He had only just realised the significance of this information and came to our camp hoping it might be of use.

Bas Celik in Varushkan Lore

Stag's Vale

Bas Celik is known to the wise ones of the Stag's vale as the progenitor of the Volodny. It was by her hand that the ritual was first performed to gain invulnerability. She tore out her own heart and locked it away inside a tree. Her name is a threat to naughty children - she will steal away children that do not go to sleep when they are told.

Vale of Gnijezdo

In our vale, the name of Bas Celik strikes fear into the heart of the bravest warrior, but is soon quelled by anger. There is a vengeance that every member of the vale has sworn to since before even our grandmother's grandmother was born.

In the days when the Vard first threatened the Ushkans, there lived in the vale of Gnijezdo a woman called Dajana. She was the apprentice to the Keeper of the Shrine of Otac and she was young, proud and beautiful.

The Ushkans called a council of Wise Ones to discuss how the Vard could be defeated. At this meeting, was a Volhov named Bas Celik. She represented a cabal that called themselves the Volodny - a group of powerful mages that aligned themselves with the Realm of Winter.

Bas Celik argued that the threat of the Vard could not be defeated by force alone, but that the only hope was to stand together in pact with the Eternals of Winter. This pact, however, demanded a heavy sacrifice of blood.

Many were the Wise that sided with the Volodny, but many rejected their proposal and the council ended with no agreement. Henceforth, it was known as the Split Council.

As the first snows since the Split Council began to fall in the vale, an emissary from Bas Celik arrived and asked for audience with the wise ones. The emissary came with a message - join with the Volodny, or the consequences would be grave.

Dajana argued passionately that they should join - the Prvi Narod were a proud people and should not bend their knees to the Vard. She was but young, there to assist her master and her wisdom was yet to emerge; thus were her words ignored.

The Wise Ones rejected the emissary, there in the vale where the primroses grow. In reprisal the emissary conjured terrible wolves with pinesap for blood and milk-blind eyes that ravaged the vale and murdered the wise and foolish alike.

In response to this grave breach of hospitality, the surviving Prvi Narod made firm pact and alliance with the Vard, and united under the wise counsel of Dajana. Now she counselled blood feud and vendetta against Bas Celik and the Volodny.

Entranced by her proud demeanour, the Vard Chieftain offered his hand in marriage. Within a generation the Vard and Ushkans were one, but the traditions of the Prvi Narod were preserved in proud union.

In time, Dajana became the head of the Wise Ones in the vale, and lead the fight against Bas Celik and the Volodny. She enacted the Rites of Spring - a pact with Yaw'nagrah, and ensured the survival of her people. Since then Briars have been born in the vale, with many being lost to madness.

Egregore Tracked

Somehow, Bas Celik was able to detect the opening of the portal by the Varushkan Egregore and then redirect it to her location. Is she also able to detect his whereabouts and other activities? Would it be possible to shield him from detection without interfering with his connection to the people of Varushka?

Civil Service Research Request

Wise Ones of Varushka have requested a search of the archives of the civil service to find any reference of Bas Celik. They hope to glean some information that may assist us in defeating her, or the Volodny.

The Wise Path

I hope I have presented my evidence succinctly and without bias, but now I must implore upon you my choice of actions -

- a. Ritual teams must be trained up to be able to find Volodny hearts*
- b. Ritual teams must be trained up to destroy Volodny hearts*
- c. Artisans must prepare items that can affect Volodny and destroy their hearts*
- d. The Volodny, and in particular Bas Celik, must be hunted down and destroyed.*
- e. An Emperor/Empress must be chosen as soon as possible*
- f. Attempts must be made to set our opponents against each other*

For these objectives to be met with all expediency, a position must be created to co-ordinate our efforts against the Volodny. If the position came with a stipend, this could be used to fund items, resources and research.

Appendix 1 - People

Information obtained from our records, traditions and stories concerning the Volodny, Bas Celik, or Alderei the Fair.

Volodny

Before the days of the Empire, a race called the Vard invaded what is now Varushka. Many of the Ushka that lived in the mountains and forests were assimilated, but the greatest of their sorcerers - who called themselves the "bargainers" - refused to bow their heads. When it became clear they were outmatched, these bargainers made terrible compacts with the Eternals of the Wasteland, the Realm of Winter. In return for dreadful sacrifices - and with the promise of more to come - these Volodny hid their hearts outside their bodies, becoming to all intents and purposes immortal. Kept alive by their hatred, and possessed of terrible hungers, they vowed collective vengeance against the Vard and those Ushka they now saw as collaborators.

These "bargainers" are the Volodny, a circle of powerful magicians from Varushka who are an ever-present threat to the Empire. Their hatred spans the generations for they cannot be permanently killed unless their hearts are found and destroyed.

Alderei the Fair

Over the centuries the Volodny kept their feud alive through malign curses and spiteful sabotage. But in the time of the first Empress, the Volodny created a terrible champion, Alderei the Fair, and whilst the Volodny refused to use steel, he had soon raised an army. Together they aimed to create an empire of their own.

Alderei swept down from the north crushing everything in his path. Whenever a settlement fell to his army, he gave the survivors a simple choice "join me, or die." To join Alderei required submission to the iron fist of a tyrant who would brook no argument, and tolerate no failure.

Many joined Alderei because, whatever else he did, he protected those who swore allegiance to him from the darkness. But the Volodny took a terrible price in blood and flesh from his supporters, both to propitiate the dark powers, and to fuel the tyrant's armies with their malign sorceries.

It seemed certain that the Varushkans would unite behind Alderei; the people had always lived in isolated communities and lacked a central authority capable of resisting the boyar. According to legend, a gathering of wise one was called and lasted for a full lunar month. It came down to a decision between two courses of action.

They could join with Alderei, march beneath his banner, help to create a thousand-year Empire, and offer the dark powers the sacrifices they craved. Or they could seek external aid - the Navarr brought news of a gathering to the south where a new way of life was being discussed, one of unity rather than subjugation.

In return for aid in their fight against Alderei and the Volodny, the Varushkans agreed to join the nascent Empire and so a great host of many nations rode into Varushka to relieve the besieged boyars. But the Volodny commanded terrible magics that none in the young empire could match. For the Urizen were yet to cast their lot one way or the other.

Born of the Ushka tribes, distant cousins of the Urizen, the Volodny assumed the two would be allies, and One amongst them, **Karetna of the Swans**, was sent to begin secret negotiations. But the Urizen chose to oppose them. "We would not support a conqueror whose heart was filled with the best of intentions," said Tiberius of Sunspire. "Why would you believe we would support one driven by bitterness and spite?"

The Urizen would not commit a military force to aid the Empire; instead, they sent three-dozen powerful mages to Varushka to support the armies. The Volodny had raised a dread pall over Alderei's armies that spread fear and confusion among his opponents. The Urizen mages performed powerful rituals using Day magic to first understand, and then pierce and disperse the pall for a time. Thus was the power of the Volodny broken, and the Imperial forces destroyed Alderei's army. The wicked Boyar was defeated and his forces scattered.

Alderei was slain with a Vorpil Sword wielded by Tom Drake the Marcher general, who sadly didn't survive to witness the Empire's triumph. Many of the Volodny met their end that day, but others escaped and hid away in the dark places of Varushka. And there they wait still, for Alderei's body was never recovered, and his return was prophesied by a dying Volodny - one day the dark king would return to take his vengeance upon the Empire.

The Eagles of Gnijezdo brought great renown for themselves and their vale in the battle. And their oaths of vengeance, and the debt of blood, were to some degree assuaged by the defeat of the Volodny.

Plagewulfs

Some histories mention that plagewulfs fought alongside the armies of Alderei the Fair. Whether this is true or not, the Volodny are known to bargain with these hideous creatures.

Threshers

The Threshers in the Marches have an interest in groups such as the Volodny and may have accumulated wisdom that would help us defeat them.

Appendix 2 - Things

Information obtained from our records, traditions and stories concerning objects associated with Alderei, Bas Celik or the Volodny

Alderei's Crown

Alderei the Fair had a crown and the Imperial Orcs believe that, because of its history, it is tainted and corrupt and if it is found it should be destroyed. Anyone who takes that item runs the risk of becoming cruel and tyrannical.

Alderei's Blade

In some Varushkan histories Alderei the Fair was said to have wielded a blackened sword with the properties of a bravo's blade, capable of inflicting devastating damage upon an opponent. The weapon, wielded in one hand was able to strike a warrior down with a single blow, penetrating armour much like the point of an arrow.

Web of Celestial Attunement

A miasma of dread created by the Volodny surrounded Alderei's armies. When Urizen magicians came together to defeat this aura, it was by way of special coven-stones that allowed them to perform rituals together. Today such coven-stones are called 'Webs of Celestial Attunement'.

Thresher's Cudgel

A Thresher's Cudgel is a one-handed weapon, often carried by Threshers in the Marches, which is able to shatter mage's rods, staves, and wands once per day. They are particularly useful against mages frozen whilst casting the paralysis spell. They require six ingots of tempest jade.

There is a story told in Varushka of three sisters who destroyed a Volodny with a Thresher's Cudgel. I have included the story below in appendix 5 - it uses the rule of three, which is an ancient storytellers device, and so it's details should be taken with caution.

Ring of Adversity

A ring of adversity allows a mage to gain additional mastery over Spring, Winter or Night magic during a single ritual each day. The most common forms taken by the ring are either a single band marked with the runes of Spring, Winter and Night; or a single ring formed of three interwoven bands, each of a different precious metal. The Volodny are known to use these rings to increase the power of their rituals.

Staff of Imperial Mastery

A staff of imperial mastery, sometimes called a staff of the archmage, grants a mage knowledge of all the known spells. It is rumoured that some artefacts staves have been imbued with the spirits of powerful magicians and Eternals.

Mangar the dark crafted one of these whilst in the service of Alderei the Fair. This sorcerous villain murdered her two brothers, the twins Tarjan and Kylearan. She used their arm and leg bones to form the core of her staff, wrapping it in black heartwood and leather made from their skin, tattooed with the many spells they knew between them. Mangar, haunted by their spirits, cast herself into a dark mere deep within Varushka. It is said that her body and the accursed artefact lie there still.

Appendix 3 - Rituals and Runes

Information obtained from our records, traditions and stories concerning rituals associated with Alderei, Bas Celik, or the Volodny.

Hold Back Frozen Hunger

A Winter ritual requiring 14 mana crystals, it wards buildings or walled areas against all undead whatever their size including, according to some stories, the Volodny and some sovereigns. Though it won't stop them, it will weaken them, and the more powerful the undead, the more it has to lose.

The area must be clearly marked with symbols or runes of warding, commonly Yoorn, Kyrop the tower symbol, and in Varushka, faces or the heads of geese. These must be protected if the warding is to hold. The warded area can be made of 3' posts separated by between three and five feet.

Words of Ending

A Winter ritual requiring 4 mana crystals that permanently destroys the properties of a Magical Item or artefact that has been used successfully to destroy Volodny hearts. On completion of the ritual, the item ceases to be magical and any bonds connected to it are immediately cut. If used on an artefact the number of mana crystals used in the ritual must exceed the number of rings of ilium used to create the artefact in the first place. 'Detect Magic' will determine this.

The Shuttered Lantern, Rune of Secrets

Diras is the Shuttered Lantern, the mirror and antithesis of Ophis, Rune of Revelation. It is a warding rune. It governs things that are actively concealed or hidden, as well as obfuscation, illusion and deception. The more someone attempts to conceal a fact, the more it becomes governed by Diras. What the Shuttered Lantern conceals, it can also be used to uncover.



It is rumoured that the lives of each of the Volodny is concealed inside a container marked prominently with this Rune. The weakness of these hidden lives is that one person (the Volodny) must always know where the item is, making it vulnerable to powerful divination.

Appendix 4 - Places

Information obtained from our records, traditions and stories concerning places associated with Alderei, Bas Celik or the Volodny.

Volodmartz

Volodmartz was of old the centre of Volodny power, and it was here that the Imperial Army defeated Alderei.

Triosk

Once a hotbed of support for Alderei the Fair and the scene of savage fighting in the war against his forces. The Empire laid siege to and burnt down the original town But Alderei sallied forth and gathered those still loyal to his final battle to the north.

Alderei's Run

Alderei's forces were finally destroyed by the Imperial Armies in the vale known as Alderei's Run. Rumour has it that he can still be heard there, ordering his men back into the fray. Caves to the north were used by Alderei's army as a store.

Vale of Gorazima

Overlooked by the ruins of the citadel of Alderei, is the Vale of Gorazima. They keep a careful watch on the ruins lest Alderei return. The Zima Ruinakh Brotherhood based in the ruins watch even more closely.

Ruin

A key mining settlement destroyed after miners delved too far into rocks under the broken peak above Alderei's Run. Who knows what they uncovered?

Void

Rumour has it that Heralds from the Realm of Winter come to Void to bargain with the Volhov there.

Appendix 5 - Stories

Stories obtained from our records and traditions concerning Alderei, Bas Celik or the Volodny.

Anushka the Scourge

Anushka squeezed her eyes tightly shut and threw the last of her power into a blast of magical force which slammed into the dark, ragged figure, throwing him off balance and onto the treacherous lip of rock overlooking the waterfall. Close to collapse, she crawled towards him as he struggled to pull himself back from the brink. Her scrabbling hand found only a rock as a weapon, and without thinking she raised it high and then slammed it down against the cadaverous skull of the filthy Volodny who had withered the crops of her village with his foul magic. The first blow knocked him insensible, his eyes rolling back in their sockets, but she kept on, hammering again and again with a furious strength she didn't even know she possessed. When she finally came to her senses she was panting and covered in gore and bone, and the Volodny was as dead as any man could be.

Shakily, the young Volhov got to her feet and tried to clear some of the gore clinging to her face, but her caked hands only made it worse. Grimacing, she reached for the dead mage's robe to clean herself, and that was when she saw it. About his finger was an exquisite ring, glistening with strands of magical metal and artistry. Beautiful and powerful, she knew what it was as soon as she laid eyes on it.

She teased the ring from the Volodny's dead finger, grimacing at his long, filth-encrusted nails, and held it to the light. Beautiful, powerful, but unwholesome; she could feel the hungers of Winter, the wild lusts of Spring and the whispered promises of Night as she held it in her hand. To repair the damage the Volodny had done, she would need more power than she currently possessed. The ring promised it would be hers, along with so much more.

She slipped it into a pocket, telling herself that she didn't need to decide now, but in her heart she knew the decision had already been made.

Sisters Three

"I will freeze your blood!" cried the Volodny, his eyes flashing with silver. He thrust towards the youngest sister, Zelda Ignazy, but she swung her axe with all her might and struck the staff in the middle, shattering it to splinters. As the Volodny reeled back, the spirits of the damned villagers swarmed upon Zelda and whispered to her of her lost love, buried these long six months beneath the frozen earth, and she wept and fell to her knees.

"I will drive you from my presence!" cried the Volodny, drawing a rod of twisted pine marked with runes of despair and fear. He swung towards the middle sister, Magda Ignazy, but she swayed aside as a tree sways in a storm, and struck the rod with her sword, shattering it to splinters. As the Volodny staggered away, the spirits of the damned villagers surged forward again, and whispered to Magda of her dead daughter, buried these long six years beneath the frozen earth, and she wept and fell to her knees.

"I will bring the shadow of death onto you all!" cried the Volodny, and drew from the hidden place beneath his crimson robe a wand carved from the bone of a child and inlaid with the black stone that was his heart, the wand that looked like a wizened finger wearing an iron ring, as heavy as the full moon.

This was what the eldest sister, Rhina Ignazy, had been waiting for. She had held back while her sisters fought, remembering what the goose had told her and her sisters, remembering the advice their grandfather had given them before they set out.

As the Volodny darted forward, his sleeves flapping like the wings of a great bloody bat, she struck with her wooden club, and broke the wand into flinders of bone and shattered crystal.

The Volodny gave a single terrible cry, and then cracks ran across his skin, as he broke apart like an old clay bowl struck with a hammer, leaving nothing but dust and tattered robes.