

*Greetings from Magister Abishai of Bethel's Wall.*

*This is a report on recent events relating to Athaliah to ensure that officers, scouts and Magisters are aware of what is happening. I am addressing copies of this letter to both the Cardinal of Loyalty and to Yael of Felix's Watch due to their involvement in the matter, and of course our Senator. Frankly, I and my fellow Magisters here are not in a good position to make a judgment as to how to proceed with the situation - we don't have the full knowledge or resources needed. I expect leadership from the Cardinal and the Senator on this matter.*

*You will be aware of the appearance of Athaliah, who claims to have been Cardinal of Loyalty during the time of the First Empress. During the Spring blight that struck Reikos, many old tombs and reliquaries were destroyed - including the bones and bodies within them. This caused Athaliah to awaken and emerge, seeking refuge in the Granite Chain ruins where a powerful ward held the Realm tide back. Athaliah is - or was, at this point - a walking, physical being. His soul was somehow tied to his body through a sacred anointment using true liao, presumably performed during the First Empress's reign. His will is set so deeply upon loyalty that he has persisted for over three centuries since his interment. In truth, he is sufficiently powerful that upon arriving at the Granite Chain, he was able to turn the ancient guardians of the tombs there to his service simply through force of his presence.*

*The initial emergence of Athaliah and the tomb guardians terrified the people hiding in the ruins. After they fled, he took possession of the relics that had been gathered there and issued demands to speak to Highborn of note and influence. During this time, he maintained that he was - and is - a Highborn, and issued his claims of being a Cardinal of Loyalty from the time of the First Empress, but it became clear that his memories of that time were at best hazy.*

*During the Summer Solstice of this year, YE 380, a delegation from Anvil travelled through the Sentinel Gate to meet with Athaliah - including the above-mentioned Cardinal and Yael of Felix's Watch. My understanding is that Athaliah was encouraged to pass onto the Labyrinth, and an attempt was made to sever the bonds tying his soul to this life. At the time, this seemed to result in his collapse and passing, and the relics were recovered.*

*Unfortunately, whatever the delegation did to Athaliah - and I am unclear as to whether it was an attempted exorcism, an attempt to sever the anointment binding his soul without using true liao, or another method - it failed. It has severed the link between the former Cardinal's body and soul, but it has not released that soul from this world.*

*The first reports of Athaliah's new manifestation came about a week after the meeting. No longer tied to his body - which seems to have crumbled or rotted away - he is now an immaterial spirit.*

*With the receding of the Spring taint, and without the limitations of a physical body, Athaliah is free to wander Reikos as he wills. He seems stricken by the loss of his body, caught somewhere between grief, shock and anger. While undoubtedly a holy figure of history and renown, he is frankly terrifying. Recently, he has become more agitated and troublesome as well, having seen Urizen forces marching into Tamarbode. It seems the spirit is both pleased by the taint being purged from Tamarbode, and with the Urizen soldiers performing the cleansing - but is angered that the armies of Highguard are elsewhere and not performing this task themselves.*

*Since the solstice, we have found his original resting place - an ancient shrine of Loyalty in Longshire. Built during an early push by the Highguard into Reikos, well ahead of the province's eventual full conquest at a later date, the shrine corroborates Athaliah's story - a Cardinal of Loyalty laid to protect this soil from those who would defy the First Empress and the Empire. However, the shrine is almost totally ruined. It must have been left in a forgotten and decrepit state even before the Druj invaded, and the tide of Spring has finished off what the toll of ages started.*

I do feel the need to repeat the above – *Athaliah's story is true*. This is a man of the Synod whose loyalty to the First Empress and to his people was such that the end of his life was not enough to stop him. Hopefully the Loyalty Assembly of today's Synod will consider his story to see what can be learned.

We have identified three rough courses of action that could be proceeded upon to resolve the situation. There may also be other possibilities that keener and wiser minds than my own can perceive. I will leave such things up to the worthies of Anvil to consider.

The first course of action would be to secure true liao and break the bonds of the ancient anointment binding Athaliah to the world. The spirit has expressed both a deep longing and deep loyalty to remain here and to protect and guide Reikos – but he also seems weary, and oft-times confused. For one with such a storied history, the Labyrinth's gate is long overdue.

The second course of action would be to rebuild the shrine of Loyalty wherein he was originally interred. This will give his spirit a place to rest, and he should return to slumber. However, there is no reason to believe it will cause him to move on from this world to the Labyrinth. He will continue his vigil over Reikos, in the name of the First Empress. If commissioned as a folly from the Senate, requiring an estimated ten or so wains of white granite, a basic new shrine could be constructed that would stand the test of time; however, were an additional ten wains of weirwood to be used in the shrine's construction, the grander construction would be far more likely to mollify and appease the spirit.

The third course of action would be to exorcise Athaliah from the world. This would not be simple. Firstly, as a ghost, Athaliah is presumably still bound to the world not only by his anointment but by a particular anchor – but we do not know what that anchor is! Without exorcising the anchor itself, Athaliah will simply continue to reform every time he is exorcised. The anchor is, presumably, in the ruins of the shrine where he was originally interred – but without knowing what we are actually looking for, finding the anchor from amongst the ruins will be like looking for a needle in a haystack. The newly constructed School of Exorcism may prove of aid here. Were the Senate to pass a motion to commission historical research into Athaliah and the shrine wherein he was interred, specifically naming the School of Exorcism as the body to undertake the research, then the Master of the School would be able to collate whatever knowledge can be scraped together that would help us identify the spirit's anchor. Simply leaving it to normal civil service researchers will, sadly, likely do little good – they don't have the needed expertise for this problem. Armed with the knowledge of the anchor, it might be possible to find it amongst the rubble and then exorcise Athaliah for good – but, while true liao would not be required for this task, it will almost certainly require a significant amount of spiritual strength to perform such an exorcism. Furthermore... The truth is that I fear that this would be a harsh and scourging way to force Athaliah's spirit from the world, as opposed to the peaceful ending granted by using true liao to release him from his anointment and his loyal task.

Preparation for any of the above will take time to organise and gather the needed resources. Such decisions are in the hands of our leaders in Anvil; we will, in the meantime, keep watch over Athaliah and report any changes. I am hoping there will be an opening of the Sentinel Gate come the Winter Solstice, so that the wisdom of our leaders can be turned to action – and the story of Athaliah decided.

Walk in Virtue,

Magister Abishai