

# Victory and unity

*"Do we not serve the Creator's will to live in ignorance and bitter rivalry?" The sandy-haired cambion preachers voice echoed round the room, drifting over the masked crowd their heads bowed in sombre reflection. "Look around you. We hold but two territories, and in my lifetime of those Kabanja nearly fell. The great forest divides us. The people of the mountain spurn us. Who knows when the Druj will next try their hand across the Path of the Eye? They are a wounded animal, it is said: a dangerous thing indeed. And who wounds them? The Casinean Empire."*

*At the mention of the Empire, the room filled with a susurrus. The figure looked around the room, and noted the people they were looking for - members of their ile died in the Mountains of the Moon, and from their faces he could see their blame directed in but one direction. He chose his next words carefully.*

*"Yes, the Casineans. I have never been to the Empire. But it comes closer every day, does it not? Even now in these halls I am sure their eyes are watching what we do..."*

*"And yet I hold in my hand a letter from the very Casinean Emperor themself. They sought something, an understanding only we were empowered to offer, and I acted.*

*"I made stipulations to preserve respect for our traditions, but I did not sit in shadowed halls and weep. I acted. By my benevolence you all have this space that we have prepared here tonight. Do you feel it? That reminder that nothing is impossible? If we ask the right questions, are we not freed from the prison of doubt? Is freedom not the foundation of our rebellion against the demiurgos?"*

*The preacher paused then, letting the crowd feel it, the powerful*

*aura that filled the room, stirring their ambitions. The novelty of it, only made the effects more potent. The belief that together they could solve any problem. It was a sentiment long absent from Axos. Now he had them, it was time to remind them of what they were really capable of.*

## **Overview**

- Axos are signatories to the Liberty Pact, but relations were seriously damaged by the Tsark Debacle

Overall, Imperial relations with the Citadels of Axos remain rocky. The animosity the Axou hold for the Empire has not gone away,; the incident with the raid on Tsark and the subsequent Imperial diplomatic response apparently confirmed their worst stereotypes about their western neighbours.

The Axou Ambassador to the Empire is Ilarch Maxatios of the Towers of Kantor. Of the same family as the Grand Ilarch (the nominal ruler of the citadel of Kantor), they are primary point of contact for Imperial citizens wishing to communicate with the smaller nation. They often seem exasperated with their Imperial counterparts, frustrated by their apparent inability to get the Empire to recognise that Axos is a nation worthy of respect.

## **AXOS**

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: Kantor and Issyk
- Ambassador: Fintan Nighthaven of Navarr

# Liberty Pact and Freedom Accord

- The Ambassador has proposed that the Axou take the lead on opposing the Freedom Accord
- Ilarch Maxatious makes clear that Axos has absolutely no ability to do so

Axos is a member of the Liberty Pact, and the Empire's support for the smaller nation in the face of Sumaah Republic and Commonwealth opposition to their presence has gone some way toward repairing the rift between the two nations over the Mountains of the Moon debacle. After the Summer Solstice, Ambassador Nighthaven wrote to their opposite number emphasizing the importance of countering the so-called "Freedom Accord" - the alliance put together by Asavea and Jarm to oppose the Liberty Pact. They proposed that the Axou might take a proactive initiative in this matter, as a way to demonstrate their value to their detractors in the Pact.

Ilarch Maxatious has responded cautiously, enquiring what exactly it is that the Empire thinks Axos can do about the Asaveans and Jarm. Axou naval forces are absolutely no match for the Asavean privateers currently attacking any ships that try to trade with the Empire and blockading the Sea of Salt. The Axou believe their magicians are the equal of any in the world, but they match the overwhelming magical resources of the Jarmish. It is clear that admitting these limitations is extremely difficult for Ilarch Maxatious, but he is forced to be realistic. Axos cannot possibly lead the way in opposing these great powers.

It is only membership of the Liberty Pact that provides them with any ability to resist the demands of Asavea and Jarm. Realistically, if the Commonwealth and Sumaah succeed in throwing them out of the Liberty Pact, the Citadels will have

almost no choice but to petition for the protection of the Freedom Accord. Perhaps making that clear to those powers that oppose the alliance between the Axou and the Empire will encourage them to stop demanding the removal of Axos?

## Outside Interests

- There are indications that outside interests are active in Axos
- Some concerns exist that Axos' activities might anger the Commonwealth

The Chambers of Issyk have a poor relationship with the Empire in general. Their early diplomatic efforts were rebuffed by the Military Council and the Senate, and they lost out significantly in the Tsark debacle. Still, while they may dislike the Empire in general, that does not stop them trading. Both the Quaymaster of the Black Sails and the Eastern Broker owe a portion of their profits to trade with merchants from Issyk.

At one time they aspired to rival the Towers of Kantor, to attract traders from all over the world. They expanded their docks, and set their tariffs somewhat lower than those charged by the more prosperous citadel to the south. A general distrust of Imperial merchants, however, meant they were never a popular destination. When the Axou joined the Liberty Pact, it brought an end to a short-lived alliance with the Grendel who retaliated by attacking and partially destroying the expanded docks, dashing Issyk's hopes of becoming a major international trade hub.

Reports have reached the Empire that this may no longer be the case. A missive from a messenger visiting Issyk speaks of work beginning on a major refitting of their docks. Not just additional quays, but large new warehouses, and the foundations of a small fortification designed to protect the harbour from raiders.

The observer reports a rumour that there has been a significant investment in Issyk's docks from a faction outside the nation. At the same time, a chance comment from a visiting Axou scholar leads to rumour of a significant construction being undertaken at the Halls of Maykop. Normally such things would be of only casual interest, but the story says that the construction is being partially financed, and magically supported, by a small coven of magicians from the Principalities of Jarm.

It is perfectly legal to trade with Jarm under the principles of the pact, but if the Axou were foolish enough to violate the terms of the pact, by importing slaves, that would reflect badly on the Empire given their staunch defence of their smaller neighbour during the recent disagreement with Sumaah and the Commonwealth. While that is unlikely, if it is true that Jarm and Axos are cooperating that is likely to anger the Commonwealth who are at war with the Principalities of Jarm.

The Commonwealth and Sumaah have been clear that they see Axos as being within the Empire's "sphere of influence", but they are unlikely to be circumspect forever. The Ambassador – or the Ambassadors to other world powers – could investigate further but if there is something underhand going on here it is doubtful Ilarch Maxatious would be candid about it. Worse, unless a query is couched very carefully it might offend the notoriously prickly diplomat as the Empire appears, yet again, to be questioning Axou sovereignty.

## **The Regario Alternative**

- The Regario Dossier agents in Axos could be mobilized to create a short report on the situation there
- This opportunity will require the master to provide 9 Thrones

to Agent Nepenthe

- The master of the Regario Dossier is Laszlo Gulyas von Temeschwar, of the Guild of Drovers

Alternatively, the Empire might call on the agents it already has in place in Axos. The Regario Dossier maintains agents in many nations. “Agent Nepenthe” is the codename for a small network of spies based in the Towers of Kantor. Under normal circumstances they maintain a low profile, primarily concerning themselves with matters that might influence Imperial trade. In this case, the civil service believe they may be in the ideal position to deliver a short report “from the ground” as it were.

This would involve the agents taking more risks than usual, and they would need additional funds to bribe informants, purchase access to sensitive documents, and so on. As such it would entail a cost of 9 Thrones. This money would need to be paid by the holder of the Regario Dossier, who is currently Laszlo Gulyas von Temeschwar, of the Guild of Drovers.

If they were paid and instructed, however, they would assess the situation in Axos and provide a concise report to the master at the Winter Solstice. They would investigate both the Issyk docks and the apparently Jarmish-sponsored construction in Maykop, as well as looking for signs of other outside involvement in the nation. They may also be able to give a cursory assessment of the populist movement gathering momentum among the Citadels.

Unlike the reports of the Conclave Orders mentioned elsewhere, the report of Agent Nepenthe would not automatically become public knowledge. While their report would be less detailed than that of a Conclave Order, there is also no chance of the agents drawing attention to themselves. Even if several orders get involved in Axos, the activity of Agent Nepenthe's network will remain hidden - both from the Axou and from the wider

Empire – unless the master of the Regario Dossier chose otherwise.

(OOO Note: If the master of the Regario Dossier wishes to take advantage of this opportunity, they would need to ensure the 9 Thrones are in their inventory and e-mail plot after the event before the close of downtime to let them know they are asking Agent Nepenthe to put together an emergency report).

## **Wains, Kings and Memories**

- The Empire has declined to sell white granite to the Axou at the suggested price
- Ilarch Maxatious has declined to explain what the Axou wanted the white granite for
- Ilarch Maxatious has declined a request for Imperial scholars to study the sorcerer-kings
- Inquiries about “memory magic” have caught few fish

There has been some recent talk of the Empire selling wains of mithril, weirwood, and white granite abroad. Last season Ilarch Maxatious inquired about purchasing granite at 18 crowns a wain for some unknown project.

Unsurprisingly, the Empire is not interested in selling at such low prices. The Ambassador has suggested that there might be more interest if the Axou were prepared to explain why they have such a sudden pressing need for white granite, but Ilarch Maxatious has declined to provide that information, as he has declined to increase the offer. “It seems clear that we cannot afford to buy from the Empire,” he writes in his letter. “So we will have to look elsewhere.”

It would still be possible for private citizens to contact the Ilarch to arrange the trade should they wish to do so, but it

looks very unlikely that the Axou will get the granite they need from the Empire.

According to their own legends, Axos was founded by magicians of consummate power, known as the sorcerer-kings, who also built the citadels that bear their names. Ambassador Nighthaven has expressed interest in learning more about their history and especially how they allegedly “transcended mortality” and asked if it might be possible to purchase information about these figures, or to send a member of the Department of Historical Research or Lepidean Library to visit the libraries and compile their own report on the matter.

The request has been respectfully declined, there appears to be little interest in such an arrangement in Axos. It is clear that while relations remain poor, such requests are unlikely to be given much time. Leontes the Scribe, the Imperial Archivist - has confirmed that there's no actual requirement to get Axou support for research into the sorcerer-kings; the Department could gather what information it can find from Imperial writings, but such work would be limited in scope without Axou approval.

Finally, the ambassador also enquired about Axou magical practices with regard to memory magic. There has been an increased interest in such matters in the Empire of late, possibly due to certain peculiar effects surrounding the ritual Cast Off The Chain of Memory. Ilarch Maxatious confirms that there are Axou that make a study of such things – practitioners of Night magic mostly associated with the Halls of Maykop. Their practice is by no means equivalent to the necromantia, but like most Axou sorcerers they take counsel from the spirits of the dead when working their magic.

Ilarch Maxatious has let it be known that there is interest in such matters in the Empire, but can promise nothing. Axou



scholars are scarcely more biddable than Imperial scholars. However it appears that the matter has caught the eye of at least one Axou. The creature Fintan calls “Apeiron of the Emporium Mnemonia” is apparently known to some. The ambassador refuses to be drawn on details, but has told those Axos who are interested in such things that they should visit the Empire themselves if they want to know more - and suggested they speak with the Imperial ambassador if they do.

## **Problematic Priest**

- A priest has been dispatched to meet with the Assembly of Nine to provide blasphemous auras
- They are expected to arrive around 8.45 on Friday evening

Last season Ilarch Kyther Deianeira offered to arrange a visit of a priest who would share certain spiritual auras associated with the malign spiritual presence of peace with the Assembly of Nine in return for a significant amount of liao and a letter from the Throne. Both were provided by Ambassador Nighthaven following the Summer Solstice.

While they clearly have only a little interest in the matter themselves, Ilarch Maxatious has passed on the message that an emissary is being sent to Anvil during the Autumn Equinox to provide the promised auras. Sophia Anacharsis is a student of Theodosia of Ipotavo and apparently an enthusiastic proponent of her ideals. Sophia intends to arrive at quarter-to-nine on the Friday evening of the Equinox. The expectation is that Ambassador Fintan can meet her and bring her to the meeting of the Assembly of Nine that takes place around that time.

She will apparently be bringing enough liao that she can perform a hallow for each member of the Assembly, though

apparently she does not expect everyone present to take up the offer. Sophia will also have the details of that oath that is the final part of the agreement. The oath will include a solemn commitment that the Cardinals actively wear the hallowed items for a year, as laid out by Ilarch Kyther when they made this arrangement.

## **Times Change**

- A populist movement is gaining momentum in Axou politics

And speaking of Ilarch Kyther Deianeira... Imperial citizens know that dealing with the Axou is always tricky. It is complicated by the fact that they are traditionally a divided and proud people whose attempts to present a reasonably united front belie a seething mass of politics both between and within the five citadels. Each citadel is effectively an independent city-state, with their own concerns and interests. In recent months, however, a movement has emerged in Axos that challenges this state of affairs and the Ilarch appears to be at the centre of it.

## **The ambitions of Kyther Deianeira**

*The Empire would like to thank Ilarch Kyther Deianeira for their good will in assisting the Assembly of Nine conducting theological research on the nature of understanding. The Emperor would also like to take this opportunity to thank Kyther for personally attending her coronation and presenting a gift on behalf of the Council of Grand Ilarchs; he truly conducted himself as one of their peers.*

*Letter to Kyther Deianeira, Emperor Vesna*

- Popular demagogue, Kyther Deianeira continues their rise to power in Axos

- They have been making great use of a letter from Emperor Vesna seemingly endorsing their achievements

A political maverick Ilarch Kyther Deianeira (who uses he/him and they/them pronouns) seems likely to be the next Grand Ilarch of the Tunnels of Kaban, despite belonging to a family whose connection to the sorcerer-kings is known to be very weak. Much of the money that funded the rebuilding of Kaban came from the trade of luxury narcotics to the rich pleasure-seekers of Anvil. Kyther's involvement in this operation has given them a reputation for ruthless but fair leadership. This sense of Ilarch Kyther as someone who can operate as a serious leader on the world-stage has been amplified by a personal letter from Emperor Vesna. The missive is widely used as a political prop by the charismatic Ilarch – as evidence that the Axou can “punch above their weight” on the world stage.

A savvy politician, Kyther presents himself not as a supplicant to the Empire but as a scrappy underdog who seizes every opportunity and makes the most of it. Following his lead, he claims, the Axou can increase their status and regain the prowess of their ancestors. They can once again become the "Nikitis Axou".

In a worrying echo of Empress Vesna themselves, he calls for the Citadels of Axos to unify in power, leadership, and strength so that together they can drive the Creator's evil from the world. When he points out that Axos is threatened by great military powers, people listen, and it is clear they do not solely mean the Druj.

“Unless we work together,” runs his increasingly popular message, “then we will surely die apart.” The message is by no means universally popular but it is attracting attention in all the Citadels of Axos.

## Understanding and Unity

- Kyther Deianeira's rise is supported by generous use of Imperial liao

As well as a letter from the Throne, Kyther has received a significant amount of liao in exchange for the theological assistance they offered to the Assembly of Nine. Liao is not easily available in Axos, and Kyther's ability to gift hallowed items, grant anointings, and order consecrations has both smoothed their relations with the great and the good of Axos society and helped sway the everyday people of the citadels.

Many of these auras are provided by the theological scholar Theodosia of Ipotavo and her sect. Theodosia is no stranger to Anvil, and is a close ally of Kyther. She and her followers primarily use the auras of Wisdom and Vigilance, as well as unfamiliar auras that may be manifestations of the blasphemous false virtue of Peace.

Speculation is rife as to where she and her fellow priests are getting the prodigious amounts of liao she is using. Even allowing for the generous donation to Ilarch Kyther, Theodosia seems to have access to an unprecedented amount of the precious substance. Unconfirmed rumour suggests that an unknown Imperial benefactor has provided Theodosia with another hundred or more liao for her personal use – and the use she is putting that to is to try and influence the Citadels of Axos to embrace Ilarch Kyther's message of unity.

Traditionally the religious sects of Axos have been as splintered and argumentative as the citadels. There is no unified Axou Synod, or even anything approaching an assembly. Indeed, the ability of Axou priests to influence their nation is quite limited. It's not clear how the other sects of Axou are responding to

Theodosia's full-throated endorsement of Ilarch Kyther Deianeira, but if enough of them endorse this message of unity, it might signal a major shift in the position and influence of the Axou religion within its nation. A blasphemous and heretical religion, it should be remembered, that sees the Way as a tool of the hated Creator that needs to be destroyed...

With apparently limitless amounts of liao to draw on – rather than the much more expensive “bone dust” Axou priests are traditionally forced to use – it seems Theodosia of Ipotavo is effectively enacting a powerful mandate to move the hearts and minds of her entire nation.

## **Magicians Know Magicians**

- The Imperial Conclave could dispatch one of the orders to investigate developments in Axos
- The Shattered Lantern are in the best position to uncover what is going on and whether it poses a threat to Imperial interests
- The Celestial Arch could be dispatched to focus on the political aspect of the movements
- If more than one order is sent, their efforts will be counterproductive and may lead to a diplomatic incident

It isn't entirely clear what exactly is going on in Axos at the moment. While Ilarch Kyther and Theodosia of Ipotavo are clearly being listened to, it's hard to say what it might mean for the Empire. Most of what Imperial citizens know about this political movement comes from the few merchants that visit the port of Kantor (it has been some years since Imperial merchants bothered to visit the docks of ill-starred and unwelcoming Issyk).

The Ambassador could of course make enquiries of their opposite number in Axos, but it might be more effective to take direct action. The Shattered Lantern Conclave order exists to “Utilise magic in the detection and monitoring of threats, whether subtle or obvious, internal or external.”

A declaration of Concord could be used to encourage Imperial magicians from the order to take the trip to Axos to investigate the situation there. As usual, this would require the commitment of 20 crystal mana from the font if the Conclave agreed to support the declaration.

Imperial visitors are common enough in the Citadels that their presence is likely to go unremarked – it's doubtful Axos will even know they are there. These magicians would investigate the political situation in Axos, with particular emphasis on the influence of Kyther Deianeira and Theodosia of Ipotavo. With that information, the Empire would be in a much better position to determine if this movement represents a threat to their interests or not. The initial report would be provided to the Grandmaster of the order at the Winter Solstice, but its findings would become more common knowledge by the Spring Equinox at least among those Imperial citizens with an interest in Axos (OOC Note: The Grandmaster would get a private report at the first event next year, but at least parts of the document would be published on the wiki after the event).

Alternatively, the Celestial Arch might ask for their order to travel to Axos. Magicians of the Arch are significantly less well-versed in espionage and information gathering however. If the order was sent, then they would focus on the secular message of Ilarch Kyther. The cost to the Imperial Conclave – 20 mana from the vault – would be the same. If the Sevenfold Path were not focused on spreading the Way in the Asavean Archipelago, then they would have been able to gain information with a focus on the preaching of Theodosia and her

allies.

There is one limitation; only a single order can be constructively sent to Axos to investigate the matter there. If more than one order gets involved, the sudden influx of Imperial magicians asking questions will become apparent to the Axou, and to Ilarch Maxatious. If this happens, it's unlikely anyone will be able to find out anything useful, and will likely result in a diplomatic incident of some kind.

## **The Solokha Project**

- An Axou movement to reclaim the cursed and haunted ruins of the Citadel of Solokha is underway
- An invitation has been sent to the Empire to invite their priests to become involved

In addition to answering queries from Ambassador Nighthaven, Ilarch Maxatious takes the time to raise some matters on behalf of Axou citizens that may involve the Empire. It is clear from the tone of his missive that he is not entirely enthusiastic about the idea, but it appears that there is a grass-roots movement to reclaim the ruins of lost, haunted Spires of Solokha.

The Axos understand the fall of Solokha to have been the fault of emissaries from Urizen, who had sabotaged Solokhan investigations into a certain sarcophagus of black stone and unleashing a terrible madness that destroyed the citadel. What historical testimony the Empire has recovered appears to corroborate this view of events, at least in part. In any case, the ruins of Solokha are known to be haunted and cursed with auras of violence and despair.

There have always been a few people in Axos who wished to cleanse the ruins of their spiritual taint, and perhaps re-establish

Solokha. With the recent successes rebuilding the Tunnels of Kaban, and apparently with the backing of someone with access to a significant amount of liao – which has significantly fewer side effects than the bone dust Axou priests usually use - the movement is apparently ready to attempt to put their ideas into practice.

As a nation that regularly deals with ghosts and restless spirits, many Axou priests are versed in the art of exorcism. There are even small groups of secular exorcists, with no particular spiritual beliefs, who practice exorcism as a trade. Yet Ilarch Maxatious passes an invitation to the Empire on behalf of the leaders of the Solokha reclamation movement. If they wish to do so, Imperial priests are welcome to participate in the exorcism of Solokha; to "make amends" for their (alleged) role in the destruction of the citadel.

The Ambassador cannot simply instruct priests to go to Axos; whether this invitation is taken up would be a matter for the Imperial Synod. A suitably worded statement of principle that achieved a greater majority would likely be sufficient to enthuse Imperial priests about this scheme, provided it were raised in the General Assembly or the Assembly of the Way. Other assemblies might raise judgements in support of the project, but without a greater majority from one of these two assemblies the civil service project that the project is likely to founder before it gains much momentum.

Any resulting mandate is likely to require a large amount of liao. Not because it will be hard to persuade Imperial priests and exorcists to take up arms against the dead, but because of the amount of exorcism, insight, and indeed consecration given the reported presence of malign location auras in the ruins likely to be involved. The report about Solokha by Eilian Sweetwater paints a grim picture of the locale.



While on the surface this might appear a uniformly good thing, taking part in this project might prove politically fraught. The priests of the Way and those of Axos fundamentally disagree on almost everything. Those Axou participating will certainly include those dedicated to malign spiritual presences. Focusing on the matter at hand will likely avoid any confrontation, but it would also represent cooperation with blasphemers and heretics. More to the point, Imperial involvement might well be taken as confirming the Axou view that the Empire was behind the destruction of the citadel in the first place, and the role of the Urizen in any statements or mandates would prove particularly sensitive.

The civil service caution that time is limited to assist in this project. Any statement will need to be raised at the Autumn Equinox is a mandate is to be prepared for Winter, otherwise the opportunity will be lost.