

Houses of Silence

The gondola rocked violently. The gondolier muttered a half-hearted apology, while expertly getting the boat back under control.

"You were telling me about the play," reminded Timeo.

"Oh yes!" Renalda brightened up. "So. This Tassatan Prince and his loyal cicisbeo make a bet to travel through every land bordering the Empire, between Anvil summits, to prove that the greatest pleasure in the world comes from outside the Empire. There's also a villain, obviously, who's this uptight bishop or something but the real antagonist is this gloomy Axou necromantia, who's hired to slow them down. She was brilliant. She has this wise-cracking skeleton puppet sidekick..."

"... a what?"

"A wise-cracking skeleton puppet sidekick. Shush. Anyway, our heroes get into various scrapes, and the cicisbeo always has a bit of potion or a rare drug or something on hand to get them out of it. There's this excellent scene where Axou drugs are shown to just make you depressed and the necromantia is like 'we enjoy being depressed'..."

"... uh huh."

"Shush I said. Trust me it was very funny. Anyway in the end they cross the finish line with barely a minute to spare. But the Prince has to admit that the greatest pleasures he experienced on the trip were from within the Empire: all those drugs his cicisbeo had. And he's from Temeschwar! The cicisbeo I mean. But wait! It turns out the cicisbeo is actually from the 'Delves, and that's why he's so great with herbs and plants. So they win the bet!"

“... really, well....”

“And then there's a party, and the necromantia and her wise-cracking skeleton puppet sidekick share this passionate kiss, and it's the funniest thing and... You're not convinced?”

Renalda looked disappointed. Timeo shrugged ruefully.

“I'm not convinced, sorry. I feel like there's some subtext here and I'm not a fan of subtext in my entertainments if I'm entirely honest.”

The gondolier expertly piloted the small vessel into its berth. Renalda paid him, and jumped onto the dock.

“Oh it's not really subtext,” she said, cheerfully, as she offered Timeo her hand. “It's pretty much all text. If you want to have a good time, the 'Delves has got your back.”

As the two of them climbed the steps up to the crowded Alivetti waterfront, a mass of people and masks and music and enticing smells, Renalda slipped her arm companionably around Timeo's shoulders.

“And this evening, my friend, you are going to see that for yourself!”

Overview

Three years ago the Sacrophan Delves approached the Empire with several proposals including the possibility of establishing trading enclaves in Varushka and Sarvos. The Imperial Senate ultimately agreed to the Vandersaar Proposal which involved ceding the Alivetti estates to the Delves, allowing them to establish a thriving enclave along the southern borders of the Empire. Over the last few years that enclave has gone from strength to strength.

The 'Delves are always interested in opportunities to increase their presence in the Empire. Some have been discussed already in the Hyenas and herbs wind of fortune. They deal with general approaches to the Empire, and the diplomatic business of the Ambassador. This wind of fortune is specifically about the situation with – and some opportunities regarding – the Alivetti estates.

The Alivetti Enclave

- The Sarcophan Delves operates an enclave in Sarvos on the old Alivetti Estates
- Magistrates have raised concerns about Imperial citizens engaging in illegal activities
- An opportunity exists to allow Sarvosan business owners to purchase narcotics and other consumables at a premium price

Over the last few years, the Vandersaar family have transformed the ruins that once belonged to Empress Giselle. They've established their own flood defences and recovered sections of low-lying land from the floodwaters that once claimed them. Established theatres, restaurants, warehouses, marketplaces, a new quayside... the place has been transformed and some say it now rivals Sarvos itself as a place for the wealthy and the influential to relax.

Recently, magical storms raised by Imperial magicians had left the Vandersaar feeling aggrieved. By all accounts a formal apology from Ambassador Hrafnar has gone some way toward smoothing ruffled feathers. Bedelar Huisbaas Annike stresses that while the Empire can of course take whatever steps it needs to protect itself in its ongoing conflict with the Grendel, advance warning of the intent to use such curses allows Sarcophan merchants to make informed decisions about which

Imperial ports to visit.

The Vandersaar

The Vandersaar are a well-established and powerful family of the Delves who trace their roots back to the first settlers in the ruined city of Sarcophan – to the House of the Lijkkever. They already have extensive trade interests in the Empire, including the sale of weirwood at the Concordium Dock. These interests have improved their standing within their house and Edwin Vandersaar now regularly takes the Lijkkever seat at the Tomb Banquet each month.

Edwin Vandersaar requests that any correspondence relating to his plan go through Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike, the trade advisor to the Delves.

Lawlessness

- Magistrates have expressed concerns about the “lawless” state of the Alivetti estates

Having been ceded to the Sarcophan Delves, the Alivetti Estates do not consider themselves subject to Imperial law. There isn't that much difference between Sarcophan and Imperial justice, but the Delves do not restrict what individual merchants are able to buy and sell. As a consequence, the Asavean narcotic Ocean's Caress – illegal in the Empire – is freely available for purchase in the Alivetti estates.

In theory, because of the nature of Imperial law, it is still illegal for citizens to visit the Estates and buy these drugs, just as it would be anywhere in the Empire. In practice no magistrate considers it to be in the interests of the Empire to send the militia into the Estates to arrest anyone. The diplomatic costs would be large to put it mildly. But there have also been a

handful of arrests of individuals trying to bring the drug back into Sarvos.

While most criminal cases have involved the drug in amounts that clearly represent personal supplies of the drug, there has been one more serious incident. A small band of smugglers attempted to transport a significant amount of the illegal substance into Riposi hidden in barrels of salt fish. If not for an anonymous tip-off, they might well have succeeded at flouting Imperial law.

Rumour has also reached the magistrates, of Sarcophan attempts to secure access to the Warming Armour and Weakening Sun, both interdicted by the Imperial Conclave. These potions both originated with the Druj and there have been significant concerns about the way they warp the personalities of those exposed to them. There's no indication that the Sarcophan have succeeded in getting access to the recipes for these preparations so far, but the fact there are 'Delves merchants who are prepared to ignore Imperial law in pursuit of profit is a matter of concern.

While the Imperial Senate chooses to exercise a light touch when it comes to prohibiting goods, Of potentially more concern is the fact that the 'Delves also do not restrict access to the boons of eternal, including those the Imperial Conclave has deemed to be enemies of the Empire. It's not even entirely clear whether the metaphysical aspects of enmity apply in the Alivetti Estates. This would in theory mean that Imperial citizens could visit the Sarcophan enclave to treat with heralds of Agramant, the Whisper Gallery, Skathe, or Siakha with impunity, and potentially receive boons from them which they could bring back into Imperial territory. Doing so would be treason - no matter where it took place - but proving it might be hard.

It's not clear what the Empire can do about this situation. The

magistrates are currently containing any potential problems that come over the border, and there's no indication any Sarcophan merchants are smuggling illegal drugs or interdicted materials through Imperial ports.

A Business Like Any Other

- The Bladoud Tuiniers seek the endorsement of the Sarvosan Chamber of Commerce for their handelsschool
- Doing so will provide opportunities for businesses to buy Sarcophan imports, but greatly reduce the effect of the College of the Liberated

The Bladgoud Tuiniers (Gold Leaf Gardeners) are a trade consortium of loosely allied Sarcophan families based at the port of Schedalhaven. They're keen for closer ties with the Empire, well aware of the number of jaded citizens who are open to novel experiences. Following the advice of the Ambassador, they have presented an offer to Imperial citizens directly – specifically those who already live near the Alivetti Estates.

They've already converted several old buildings along the waterfront into a Sarcophan handelsschool – a combination of merchant academy and business school. These establishments are common in the Delves, and in places where the Sarcophan have established enclaves. They teach apprentices the practical arts particularly valued by Sarcophan houses – trading, bookkeeping, and sailing. Fees are usually quite steep, but the quality of the education received is second to none, albeit quite focused.

The Bladgoud Tuiniers handelsschool has attracted a few Imperial students, but it is barely turning a profit at the moment. This has led to a visit from Aaven Beekhof, a major stakeholder

in the Bladgoud Tuiniers. After examining the situation, they have presented a proposal for the Sarvosan Chamber of Commerce. If they are prepared to endorse the Alivetti Estates handelsschool, then the Bladgoud Tuiniers will offer their goods to members of the Chamber at a significant discount.

Chamber of Commerce

Money	Narcotics
36 rings	2 doses
72 rings	4 doses
108 rings	6 doses

- The Sarvos Chamber of Commerce may choose to endorse the handelsschool in the Alvietti enclave
- This would allow Sarvosan businesses to purchase drugs and narcotics from the Delves during downtime
- It would remove the additional money provided by the College of the Liberated great work
- The Chamber of Commerce will meet at 15:00 on Saturday in the League

During the Autumn Equinox, the Sarvosan Chamber of Commerce is invited to meet and make a decision whether to endorse the handelsschool or not. Every business owner in Sarvos is part of the city's Chamber of Commerce, and the egregore has worked with the civil service to secure an updated list of everyone eligible to vote. Discussion and vote will take place at three in the afternoon on Saturday; the decision will be by show of hands among all those eligible.

Endorsing the handelsschool will have two significant

outcomes.

As long as the Alivetti Estates remain part of the 'Delves, Sarvosan business owners will be able to acquire drugs, narcotics, and other consumables imported by Sarcophan merchants. During downtime each season they will be able to choose to spend some of the money produced by their business to buy narcotics offered from the Alivetti Estates. They will only be able to buy one kind of drug each downtime, but can change how much, which type, and whether they want any each season. As part of the initial arrangement, the Bladgoud Tuiniers will offer a choice of five drugs

- **Cognos:** A Sarcophan-made narcotic that helps clear the mind and encourage rational thought.
- **Moondust:** A drug popular with Sarcophan caravan guards that heightens alertness and grace.
- **Jadebloom Petals:** A recreational narcotic that heightens sensation and appreciation of beauty.
- **Yellow Lotus:** A golden liquid that inspires strong emotions and outbursts of humour.
- **Stoneheart Syrup:** A drug that removes feelings of guilt and shame, previously known as Kraken's Ink (the name has been changed by Sarcophan merchants to avoid confusion with actual kraken's ink brought into the Empire by hunters on the Sea of Snow).

The exact offers might change depending on what proves profitable, which substances the Bladgoud Tuiniers have access to at a given moment, and any advice the Ambassador to the Sarcophan Delves might provide about Imperial tastes. They won't offer any substance that the Imperial Senate has declared to be illegal, however. If citizens want to experience Ocean's

Caress, for example, they will need to do it in the Alivetti Estates.

The decision is not without cost however. The handelsschool is in direct competition for students with the College of the Liberated in Trivento. While the College was originally set up to offer apprenticeships to orcs freed from the Principalities of Jarm, these days its student body is made up primarily of young humans. The College represents investment in the businesses of Sarvos, but if the students are encouraged to study elsewhere the benefit it provides will be lost, reducing the amount of additional income received by business owners as a result of the great work by 36 rings each season (from 108 rings to 72 rings).

Loud Silence

- A sect of Sarcophan priests are establishing a temple in the Alivetti Estates enclave
- They are interested in securing 40 wains of white granite at 4 thrones a wain to complete their temple
- Concerns have been raised about the impact of a blasphemous and heretical temple on the Empire's doorstep

The Sarcophan are by all accounts not a particularly religious people. There are people of faith among them of course, but they are by-and-large not followers of the Way. The Empire has recently built a gorgeous cathedral in the Delves, as have the Sumaah Republic, but while there is a community of pilgrims there, it is by no means a dominant religion.

Not very much is known about the Sarcophan's own religion. It seems to be based around the blasphemous and heretical idea that the wealth one amasses in life ensures one a place in a

shadowy afterlife they call the houses of silence. They believe that only the poor and indolent reincarnate, because they have not amassed enough wealth in life to purchase a permanent place in the afterlife which is often depicted as a kind of paradise where one's every desire is fulfilled.

Death comes for everyone
Sarcophan adage

Sarcophan priests are apparently identifiable by their ornamented death-masks and the hooded vestments they wear, reminiscent of burial shrouds. At home, they fill a secular role similar to that of the Imperial civil service albeit on a much smaller scale, and prone to a great deal of corruption. Most priests concern themselves with ceremonial functions, especially marriages and the strange cannibalistic funerals favoured by the people of the 'Delves.

There is no major temple of the Sarcophan faith in the Empire, but it seems that one particular sect intends to change that. The Community of Silence (the Gemeenschap van Stilte) are a moderately influential sect that specialises in supporting the spiritual (and in many cases medical) needs to Sarcophan enclaves in other nations. Poortwachter Lenart Farber has secured a portion of land in the Alivetti Estates and has broken ground on a Silent Manse – a religious site dedicated to the Sarcophan faith.

This would be illegal in the Empire, but it's a different matter in the Alivetti Estates.

If You Build It...

- The Community of Silence needs to source 40 wains of white granite
- Their leader, Poortwachter Farber, is interested in securing

the granite from Imperial sources

- Missives pertinent to the building of the Silent Manse on the Alivetti Estates can be directed to *Poortwachter Farber, The Jolly Buidelrat Inn, Sarvos.*

Ground has been broken on the new temple, but work is proceeding very slowly – primarily due to the fact that the Community of Silence are having some difficulty sourcing the white granite they need. The threat of the Children of Wrecks has had an impact on the cost of transporting the amounts of stone they would need to the Bay of Catazar. Before they commit to the costly endeavour of importing stone from home, Poortwachter Farber is keen to see if any Imperial merchants are able to fulfil their needs.

The Community of Silence needs 40 wains of white granite to build their temple. Bedelaar Huisbaas Annike has communicated that they are prepared to pay 4 Thrones a wain for the white granite they require. They are keen to receive Winged Messengers from anyone prepared to make an offer to provide them some or all of the white granite they need.

(OOO Note: Anyone sending a Winged Messenger stating how many wains they are prepared to provide, could expedite the trade by ensuring they have the white granite in their inventory and letting plot know by email).

The civil service note that Poortwachter Farber represents a wealthy sect. If Imperial citizens refuse to sell them any white granite, they will be able to purchase it elsewhere eventually. Work building the temple will take three months once the materials are secured. If the Community of Silence fails to get the bulk of the white granite from Imperial sources, however, it will take them a bare minimum of six months to secure the material from the Delves, giving the Empire nine months to consider what to do about the presence of a significant site of

worship on their doorstep.

Fine Art and Dark Spirits

- Once work begins, the Poortwachter Farber wishes to employ Imperial artists to make the place beautiful and inspiring
- The Ambassador has been asked to prepare a short-list of Imperial artists who might be employed by the Sarcophan
- The priests of the Silent Manse are prepared to accept an invitation to speak about dark spirits, once the work is complete

As well as white granite, Poortwachter Farber is keen to employ Imperial artists to help provide decoration for their temple. It is traditional, apparently, for the Community of Silence to employ local sculptors, painters, and glasssmiths when building their temples and shrines. Lenart asks whether the Ambassador could provide them with a list of three or four of the Empire's best artists and what kind of price they would expect to be paid to provide their expertise to the construction of the temple.

Poortwachter Farber is also aware there is some interest in the Empire about what the priests of the Sarcophan Delves know about “strange creatures that appear to reside in the Labyrinth.” Once the Silent Manse is complete, the Community of Silence is prepared to accept an invitation from the priests of the Empire to discuss these matters, and perhaps share a little of what they know about the “bad spirits” that are said to bedevil the Houses of Silence, should the Imperial Synod still be interested.

No Thank You, Poortwachter

- The temple will be open to Imperial citizens as well as

visiting Sarcophan

- With the best will in the world the teachings of the Sarcophan faith are blasphemous and heretical

Several pilgrims of the Vigilance assembly sound a note of caution. The priests of the Community of Silence will not bar anyone from their temple, or their religious services. As with the Temple of Balo and the Black Bull before it, the Silent Manse represents a significant threat of exposing Imperial citizens to blasphemous and heretical ideas.

The Senate cannot prevent the temple from being built without ending their treaty with the Sarcophan Delves. This would have a serious diplomatic impact, as a number of agreements with the Sarcophan hinge on the existence of the Alvietti Enclave.

The Imperial Synod could delay the work on the temple through the careful use of judgements. A suitably worded statement of principle could lead to a mandate discouraging Imperial builders working with the Community. A mandate in the League national assembly might delay the work by a further three months; a mandate in the General Assembly or the Assembly of the Way could delay it by as long as six months as no Imperial citizen is prepared to help build the structure. But, as with the white granite, the Sarcophan priests would eventually secure workers to help complete their work. They could also focus on discouraging Imperial citizens from visiting the temple once it was completed – but doing so would mean discouraging them from visiting the Enclave. This could have a chilling effect on relations with the Delves.

Alternatively, the Ambassador could seek a diplomatic way to put a stop to the Silent Manse by discussing the matter with their opposite number in the Delves.

The civil service caution however that it is common practice for

a Sarcophan enclave to contain a shrine or temple. While there may be political pressures that could be brought to bear on the Community of Silence, it is not in the interests of the Bedelaar Huisbaas to do so without good reason. It may also lead to a decline in relations with the Delves – they allowed the Empire to build a massive cathedral in their own city after all. For the Empire to balk at allowing citizens of the Delves to build a temple on land that the Senate ceded to the nation could be seen as rude, at the absolute best.