

Wasp nest

They stood, almost shoulder to shoulder but not quite touching, as the sun hid his face and the darkness crept in. The only sound in the clearing was their slow breathing, the lapping of the waves, and the arrhythmic buzz of diurnal and nocturnal insects swapping shifts. Isaiah marked the unnatural sheen of the surface of the lake; the malign red, sick green, vile yellow. Like droplets of oil in a glass, but worse. Some of the younger trees that drank from the tainted pool were already dying. The older ones weathered it better, but any arborist could see the signs that there was something wrong with them. The Highborn shuddered to think what the water of this lake might do to the people, or the animals, if they drank it. The thought frightened him more than the knowledge that they were no more than a handful of miles from the borders of Eastring, where the Druj were.

Shadows deepened, and Carys unshuttered her clay lantern, spilling out light. The stone's illumination was steady, but caught the lake in such a way as to make the corruption even more evident.

"It happens every night at this time," said the Navarr, her gaze still fixed on the shallow water along the lakeshore. "There, do you see it?"

Isaiah leaned forward, squinting, The pale light picked out movement in the water. Not ripples, not waves, but the suggestion of movement. Then, he saw the boot-tops and the legs. Dark hues spilt upwards from the water, like liquid metal poured into a mould. Legs, torso, arms, a terrified face. All picked out in the water and the corruption of the lake. They were limping. shambling really, through the water along the shore. They looked back over their shoulder, desperation clear

despite the barely finished formation of their features.

"They're trying to lose pursuers," said Carys. Her voice throbbed with emotion, as she tried to remain detached.

"They're injured. Sometimes the Druj let prisoners... wait, here it comes." She sounded to be on the verge of tears.

The figure stopped suddenly, staggered, collapsed forward. The watery colours that composed them began to become darker. Something like blood thickened their shape from the inside out, and began to drip down into the lake.

"An arrow, in the back," whispered Isaiah.

The wraith shuddered again, and then a third time. Two more arrows striking them from the front, in the stomach, making it clear to them in their last moments that they would never have escaped, that this was nothing more than a game and their fate was sealed before they had begun to run. They fell back into the water, lay face up. Not dead. Isaiah wanted to turn away but could not, knew he owed this spirit, this shadow of someone they had never met.

The ghost reached up, beseechingly, begging. There was no sound, and no answer. The Druj weren't visible - only the poor damned spirit could see their tormentors. Their body convulsed again, and began to sink beneath the water. No, not sinking. Forced. Pressed into the mud by some invisible tormentor with their boot on the figure's chest.

Carys could take no more. She moved forward with her light, as she'd done half a dozen times before on different nights, and called out to the ghost thrashing in the corrupted water, softly, gently, telling them that it was over and that the Dance awaited them. They had tried this before, but each time the ghost had simply faded away, the awful scene of their death ready to replay again. This time, though, the Navarr priest had Isaiah with her. He touched the blue flame stitched into the woollen shawl and smearing a little liao on the icon, and let the scent of it open his eyes. Perhaps he could gain insight into

what it was kept this poor lost soul trapped here, on the edge of the lake, reliving their torment and death over and over.

It was too late, had likely been too late since the ghost stumbled in the water. The Highborn had a sense of pain, and loss, and frustration, and the fading hope that shone for a moment through the dark that this person - whoever they had been - would someone make it out would tell... someone... something. Then it was gone, slipped away, and the ghost with it.

Carys breathed a shuddering breath, and did not try to fight back the tears any more. Another attempt, another failure. Isaiah reached out and rested a hand on her shoulder, his own eyes glittering, and spoke with a quiet certainty that welled up from deep within his soul.

"We will do this," he said gently, hoping that she understood that they were in this together, that she was not alone, any more than this poor spirit was alone. "We will do this. We will find a way to make this right. We will."

Overview

At the Autumn Equinox, the Highborn Assembly upheld a statement of principle from **Hazelelponi of the Shattered Tower** that restated their peerless kinship with Navarr. The judgement passed with a greater majority reflecting the desire to help strengthen their kin and do what they could to support their fellow nation. It is the last such judgement that can be passed as a result of the **Full of sacred sound** wind of fortune

Arianwen Thornfield's judgement to guide the Highborn proposed a priority of the Navarr asking the Highborn priests to help them lead the restless souls that wander

Therunin to their rightful place. The judgement is shrewd and well considered - of all the nations of the Empire, none have more experience in dealing with unquiet shades as the Highborn, they are well placed to offer expert help.

Unfortunately, the situation in Therunin is far from ideal. The majority of the ghosts seem to be anchored in Eastring, a location that is firmly under the control of the Druj. There may have been a hope that the invaders would have been defeated and East Ring liberated, but any such hope has been cruelly dashed. Nonetheless, working with the help of their Highborn allies the Navarr priests are able to create a plan to deal with the ghosts in Eastring, but it would be impossible to put the plan into action until the entire region is firmly under Imperial control. Any action will have to wait until then.

Thwarted in their primary goal, the Highborn pilgrims look to see what other aid they can offer *now*.

Highguard, our kinship with Navarr is Peerless. Our Loyalty to them has been acknowledged and praised. So we shall continue our actions in Pride. I once again call upon us to use Peerless Kinship to aid in Therunin as we once did in Brocéliande. They have asked, we MUST answer. Show that we deserve to raise the Grey Pilgrim army. Aid our ally.

*Hazelelponi of the Shattered Tower, Highborn Assembly, Autumn
Equinox, 386YE, Vote: Greater Majority 486-28*

Unrestful souls wander Therunin unable to find the labyrinth due to the horrid massacre and inaction of this assembly. We call to our siblings in Highguard to help us lead the souls to their rightful places.

Arianwen Thornfield, Navarr Assembly, Autumn Equinox, 386YE,

Vote: 190-28

A Haunting Melody

- **The spirits gathering in eastern Therunin remain restless**
- **An inspirational location would help the spirits find their rest**

The Imperial counterattack into Therunin left thousands dead, and that butchers' bill has only increased since. Such wholesale slaughter saw Eastring become haunted by the restless dead, even before the fallen Iron Helms began their rampage. Soldiers who escaped the meat grinder speak of uneasy ghosts lashing out at any who come near, or leaving those that listen to their woes and wails with a lingering sense of dread and a bone-deep weakness.

The Gift of Kaela offers an escape, albeit a tragic one, for those who fall into the hands of the Druj. Yet death in battle is often sudden, painful, and woven with feelings of anger, loss, desperation; perfect conditions for ghosts to arise. There is something about these restless spirits, trapped as they seem to be in the mortal world by their sadness and ire, that seems

particularly unsettling for many Navarr. This remaining - not going into the Labyrinth, not continuing the Great Dance - is abhorrent. There is perhaps no other Imperial nation better suited to helping the Navarr to deal with these unquiet dead than that of Highguard. The Necropolis in particular is a place haunted by the spirits of the past; there are rumours that at certain times in history, the ghosts have outnumbered the living in Necropolis. Those ghosts who linger there sometimes become angry and disruptive and must be quieted or dealt with.

Unfortunately, Eastring where many of the lingering dead seem to be found, is firmly under the control of the Druj. There are also unquiet spirits in conquered East Ashes, and in the barbarian-threatened Lower Tarn Valley. The invading armies are buoyed up by the cruel destruction of the Iron Helms and Isaella's Dance. The Black Wind seem particularly eager to get their hands on Imperial priests, to exact a bloody revenge on the Empire who they hold responsible for the murder of their sept leaders. At best, any priests who attempted to enter Eastring to deal with ghosts would likely be slaughtered by the Druj, or left with no choice but to take Kaela's bitter gift. At worst, the cruel orcs might find a way to break their spirit and turn them against the Empire as they have done before, in the Barrens and in Zenith.

Stewards of the Dead who have made the journey to Therunin are determined not to disappoint their peers among the Navarr.

Together, they discuss a plan. Some suggestions come from an unlikely force; soldiers from the Dawnish armies that have fought in Therunin, receiving sanctuary and treatment for their terrible wounds at Peakedge Stead and the Houses of Healing, talk about the shrine of hope in the Barrens that helps those who fell in that wild territory find rest.

Glade of Farewell

Establish Glade of Farewell

Commission Type: Edifice

Location: Lower Tarn Valley, Eastring, East Ashes

Cost: minimum 9 wains of weirwood, 27 crowns

Special:

- The region must be fully Imperial, and not have any poison or other corrupt quality
 - Would require a writ of consecration once completed
 - Grandeur of the memorial would influence the final effect, but at the minimum would remove the haunted quality from Eastring
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- **A glade consecrated with true liao would help the angry spirits of Therunin to move on**
 - **A commission is required to make a suitable location, and a writ of consecration is needed to complete it**
 - **The *Glade of Farewell* would need to be built in a region ravaged by the Druj that was under Imperial control and**

not corrupted by Druj malice

A sacred site established in eastern Therunin would help the restless dead find peace. There are several locations in Eastring, East Ashes, and the Lower Tarn Valley that would be suitable; it would require a glade and the construction of a memorial that remembered all those who fell to the Druj whether soldiers or innocent civilians claimed by the cruel barbarians. A suitable memorial would not need to be ostentatious; a minimum of 9 wains of weirwood would be required placing the commission within the reach of the Mistress of Monuments for example. Contribution of more weirwood would increase the grandeur of the final memorial however, so there are potential advantages to having it commissioned by someone capable of building a larger structure. At the end of the day the important thing is that this place be reminiscent of the corpse glade, but rather than one where the bodies of the fallen are laid to rest it would be a place that attracted the spirits of the fallen and helped them leave the shackles of the mortal world behind.

The *Glade of Farewell* would need to be built in one of the regions of Therunin ravaged by the Druj, but not necessarily in Eastring itself. While there are more spirits in Eastring, there are also ghosts gathering in parts of Lower Tarn Valley and East Ashes. Indeed, if the Druj engage in further slaughter in either of the latter two regions it seems likely they, too, might acquire the haunted quality. Unfortunately, until Eastring or East Ashes are liberated, or the corruption that pools in the

Tarn Valley is removed, the memorial will achieve nothing save remind the dead of their loss. The region where it is built must be recaptured, or purified, before the memorial can be blessed. Of course, even if this is done there is a chance the Druj might disrupt building if their armies press west.

Once the construction is complete, the Highborn propose that it should be consecrated with true liao in the same way the Shrine of Hope was. After a great deal of discussion, they recommend that it be consecrated to one of the virtues of, Pride (exalting the sacrifice performed by the fallen and the victims of the Druj), Loyalty (commemorating the commitments of those who fell to their people and their allies), or Courage (recognising that those who fell to the Druj fought to the very last for what they believed in). This would require the usual writ of consecration in the appropriate assembly, and provided it met the usual criteria and the memorial had been completed, it would create an opportunity to consecrate the *Glade of Farewell*.

Once that were done, the exact effects would depend on the virtue chosen and the grandeur of the memorial, but at the bare minimum, it would allow those trapped as ghosts in eastern Therunin to move on (it would remove the haunted quality from Eastring).

A Cleansing Song

Cleanse the Corruption

Location: Therunin

Cost: 30 thrones a season

Time: Six months

Special: Cost would be cut to 10 thrones a season if an appropriate Imperial Sodality of apothecaries voted to undertake the task

- **Highborn magisters are bringing samples of the substance that has poisoned the Lower Tarn Valley to Anvil**
- **If an antidote can be found the apothecaries of the Empire could be encouraged to deploy that solution in Therunin**

Unable to immediately help the Navarr lay to rest the spirits of the dead, the Highborn pilgrims look for other ways to help. Another pressing problem besides the ghosts and the Druj is that of the poisonous and ravaged land of the Lower Tarn Valley. While it is once again under Imperial control but it is far from safe, not least because the orcs of the Mallum are notorious for leaving assassins and saboteurs behind when they are driven out. For the *Glade of Farewell* to be built there, the corruption that pools in the earth and water must first be removed.

Like Eastring, the Druj are behind the problems here. The contents of Sephals Cauldron were spilled in the Lower Tarn Valley during the Summer Solstice, and the cursed brew sank deep into the ground and spread across the region. The situation *could* have been even worse if the Druj's full scheme had been realised, but that is scant comfort for those who remain in the region. Already this season, it has cost the lives of Imperial soldiers, and in conjunction with the Spring curse hanging over the territory it has caused the death of two dozen Navarr and Great Forest Orcs living in the Lower Tarn.

Isolating an Antidote

- **A herbal antidote to the poisoning needs to be discovered**
- **The highborn magisters have asked Hazelelponi who enacted the peerless kinship mandate to take the lead**
- **Samples of the poison will be brought to the Highborn camp at 15.00 on Saturday afternoon**

Between them, the Highborn and the Navarr are some of the most skilled herbalists in the Empire, but dealing with the malison the Druj have unleashed will require first unlocking the secrets of the poisons the Druj created to taint the land.

Skilled apothecaries would need to analyse the toxic concoction that the Druj brewed, and devise a way to deal with it. To make that possible, Highborn magisters have carefully collected samples of the poison from the pools and marshes of the Valley. Being at pains to protect themselves against the

threat of the venom with solemn rites of purification, they have managed to gather a small amount of reasonably pure venom.

Aiming to arrive in the Highborn camp at three in the afternoon on Saturday during the Solstice, their hope is that, with the guidance of **Hazeleponi**, who enacted the mandate, the apothecaries of Anvil will be able to work together to find a way to analyse the substance and find a cure.

What little is known about the mixture the Druj prepared in Sephal's Cauldron has already been provided by the Civil Service in the **Ashes** wind of war. Presumably those seeking a solution will be able to use these initial notes as the basis for a successful approach to analysing the poison.

Practical Solutions

- **If an antidote can be discovered, the Imperial Senate could coordinate apothecaries to remove the taint on the Lower Tarn Valley**
- **This would require a Senate Motion and investment of 30 thrones a season for two seasons**

Presuming an antidote can be isolated, the next step would be to make it as public as possible. The Imperial Senate can use a senate motion to publicise this information much as they would with a new set of potion recipes being made available to Imperial apothecaries. As part of that motion, they could also instruct the civil service to work with Imperial citizens to put that antidote to work removing the poisoned quality from the

Lower Tarn Valley.

Doing so would take six months, and cost the Imperial treasury 30 thrones each season. It is also quite risky; the Druj are in Eastring and East Ashes. While they might suffer from another attempt to invade the Lower Tarn Valley, they know enough about the venom to ensure that their losses will be fewer than those suffered by Imperial armies fighting in the region. If they plan to continue their invasion of Therunin then they must either push along the northern route through the Tarn Valley or attack the vallorn in Greenheart - the latter is something they are very unlikely to do. If they went into the Lower Tarn while apothecaries were attempting to deal with the poison there, it's likely the project would be delayed *at best*. If those working there were unprotected the results would be *much* worse.

Peak Pharmacy

- **The Benefactor of High Chalcis could redirect the bounty of herbs produced by the Gardens to treat the poison in Therunin**
- **Doing so would reduce the herbs available for purchase by the High Herbalist of Sybella while the work was underway**

There are a few alternatives to the Senate taking the lead. Across the border, in Reikos, lie the Gardens of High Chalcis, built in part as a monument to those who suffer at the hands of the Druj. In addition to the Highborn who tend the gardens, there is a significant population of Navarr herbalists and

physicks mostly from the steading of Peakedge Song.

The Benefactor of High Chalcis could use their power to redirect the bounty of the Gardens to help remove the corruption from Therunin. As long as they included the details of the antidote, there would be no monetary cost to the Imperial Treasury. The majority of the herbs would come from High Chalcis, and any shortfall would be made up by devout herbalists in other parts of Highguard. As always, however, using this power would mean the great work would provide no additional herbs to the herb gardens of Reikos during the time it took to clear the poisonous taint, and the Benefactor themselves would receive no personal herbs either. This decision would *also* have implications for the High Herbalist of Sybella – with fewer herbs available to buy in Highguard they would lose access to the top two ranks of their ministry while the purification takes place (this would not impact their ability to buy herbs from the Kruidenkenner however).

Once committed, the effects would persist until the corruption was removed from the Lower Tarn Valley, or the Benefactor chose to end them with another announcement.

Militant Physicks

- **The Valiant Pegasus, Blood Cloaks, or an army under Bound by Common Cause could help clear the poison, reducing the time needed to a single season**
- **Any army working in the region would suffer the effects**

of poison unless protected by the enchantment Why Sulemaine Walked Away From The Baker

The army of the Valiant Pegasus presents another alternative. They have many expert apothecaries and herbalists among their numbers. Unfortunately, the army is currently engaged in the liberation of the Mournwold. If they were to come to Therunin, however, and use their Tend the Fallen order they could clear the poisoned quality from the Lower Tarn Valley in a single season, as well as providing protection to anyone there against a Druj invasion.

There is a risk to such a plan, of course, in that the army would be exposed to the very poison quality they were cleansing. But the magisters of Highguard point out that the Winter ritual Why Sulemaine Walked Away From The Baker provides protection to soldiers from poison. The Valiant Pegasus – or the physicks of the Bloodcloaks of Wintermark – could be defended from the corruption of the Tarn Valley if they bore the enchantment.

In theory, any army could work with the apothecaries encouraged by the Senate to help deploy the antidote. Unfortunately, no other army possesses the expertise of these the Valiant Pegasus and the Blood Cloaks. Perhaps Isaella's Dance might have been in a position to undertake the work but they are no more. Any other army would need the benefits of Bound by Common Cause to help work with the inhabitants of the Lower Tarn and the apothecaries. This would leave them vulnerable to the effects of the poisoned quality, unfortunately.

Regardless, they would also need to take a defensive order that mentioned their intent to help cleanse the Lower Tarn Valley of corruption.

An army deployed in this fashion would be able to clear the poison in a single season, and could ensure that the apothecaries working there were able to complete their work even in the face of further Druj aggression. It would still cost the Imperial treasury 30 thrones, or the people of Reikos their herbs, but hopefully for a single season.

Limited Opportunities

- **These solutions rely on the Empire maintaining control of Lower Tarn Valley - these plans would be defunct if they lose control of any part of the region**

The plan to restore the Lower Tarn Valley relies on the Highborn assessment of the situation as it is now. If the Druj attack the Tarn Valley again in force and claim *any* of the region it will invalidate the scheme and a new approach will be needed.

Stand for a Dream

Micah's Stand

Commission Type: Wayhouse

Location: Chalcis Mount, Reikos

Cost: 12 weirwood, 12 white granite, and 72 crowns

Effect: Creates the title of *Keeper of the Stand*
Standard benefits of a wayhouse.

Special:

- Increases the production of the Benefactor of High Chalcis to 8 of each herb.
- Increases the great work production of the Gardens of High Chalcis by 1 Imperial roseweald

Keeper of the Stand

Type: Navarr

Appointment: Any

Powers: Receives 10 doses of liao and 10 drams of random herbs each season

Responsibilities: To protect the wayhouse and the Navarr who live in Reikos. To work towards the reclamation of Vale's Lament from the vallorn.

- **The *Micah's Stand* wayhouse could be constructed in Chalcis Mount**
- **In addition to the normal benefits of a wayhouse, this would provide benefits to the Benefactor of High Chalcis and the herb gardens of Reikos**
- **This opportunity remains open until the end of the Summer Solstice 387YE**

Cooperation is not a one-way street. While the Highborn work in Therunin, their efforts provide an opportunity closer to home. When Reikos was reclaimed from the Druj and Urith Barath

was torn down, the Navarr and Highborn working together managed to translate the herbals claimed from the Stone Toad sept. Since then, there have been Navarr living around, and caring for, the Gardens of High Chalcis.

With the Last Battle wayhouse built in the Barrens, the steading of *Micah's Stand* - a small group devoted to the memory of the Highborn who welcomed them in – suggest that a wayhouse be built in Reikos. A wayhouse built in eastern Reikos would allow the Navarr of Therunin to live close to their home - whilst still being safe from the Druj.

Several of the larger chapters of Chalcis Mount are supportive of this plan; Micah's Stand, and others like it, have proved excellent neighbours, and they remember the suffering of knowing that your home was under the terror of the Druj. The steading, and those who moved, would wish to see an Imperial title who could represent them, someone they could go to with worries and who could be prevailed upon to speak on their behalf at Anvil. The steadings also look north to fecund Brocéliande, and Vale's Lament in particular. The Navarr would want the title, *Keeper of the Stand* perhaps, to strive towards removing the vallorn from any border of Reikos.

Building a wayhouse in Chalcis Mount would cost a little more than usual, but it would attract skilled Navarr herbalists to visit the region. The exchange of skills with the citizens who tend the Gardens of High Chalcis could only benefit the Empire,

increasing the bounty of herbs delivered to the Benefactor of High Chalcis by one of each type and providing one additional Imperial roseweald to every herb garden in the territory.

Micah's Stand would need to be commissioned before the start of the Summer Solstice 387YE, otherwise the opportunity will be lost.

The Deathstinger in the Woods

- **The Highborn raise serious concerns about Peakedge Stead being undefended**
- **A fortification could be built in Therunin specifically to protect Peakedge Song and the Apothecary college**

There's one other matter that the Highborn passing through Therunin are concerned by. Peakedge Stead is one of the centres of the healing arts in the Empire. The new college of apothecaries has been established there. In addition to Navarr healers, there are regular visitors from Highguard and a permanent community of Great Forest Orc herbalists here.

The Druj... the Druj have a very nasty track record for targeting places such as these. Centres of learning, hospitals, places where compassionate people work to reduce the pain and suffering in the world. The Druj have poisoned the Lower Tarn and slaughtered both humans and orcs who once lived there, but they may have another juicy prize in their sights - a

testament to the friendship between Navarr and the orcs of the Great Forest makes it an irresistible target to the Druj.

With the destruction of the Holt of the Oak, Peakedge Song is protected only by distance. The Highborn are a people who set great stock by sturdy stone constructions, especially castles and forts. They are very concerned that without defence, it is only a matter of time before someone or something destroys the hospital. If the Druj do not manage it, then the vallorn might do it when the hearts are brought together and abominations pour out of Sweetglades.

The Navarr themselves are not great builders of fortifications - their steadings are strong but they are very far from castles - but they have friends who are. The Vigilant Swan gives the Highborn access to the white granite needed to construct a castle. The pilgrims also point out that there is a measure of Vigilance in helping to defend Therunin - if the territory falls entirely and Peakedge Stead is destroyed then High Chalcis itself will likely be the next target for the orcs of the Mallum. Alternatively, the Great Forest Orcs could likely be prevailed on to build a fortification from weirwood much as they did with the Holt of the Oak; they have an investment of their own in Peakedge Stead, and their own reasons to want to protect Therunin from the Druj.

Of course, a fortification may prove unnecessary. The Druj might be driven out of Therunin at any moment. When the

vallorn of Therunin rises, Imperial armies might be able to protect Peakedge Stead. But, even without any special scheme by the Druj, if they were able to conquer Peakedge Song it is inconceivable they would not destroy Peakedge Stead, and the apothecary college, in the process.

In the Garden

- **The briars previously working the Garden of Glory have disappeared**
- **The Keeper of the Garden will receive 12 doses of liao each season**
- **The Garden is under serious threat from both Druj and vallorn**

Shortly before the Summer Solstice 383YE, the briars of the Lower Tarn Valley - allies of the Great Forest Orcs – were granted permission by the Senate to refine their own liao in an old liao garden located on the edge of Sweetglades, in the far south of the Lower Tarn Valley. **Aerowen Embercast** served ably as the first Keeper of the Garden, and the briars were happy to provide six doses of liao in return for keeping half that was produced from their efforts.

The briars have gone, now. It's not known if they were killed at Dourfell Keep, if they were slaughtered during the Druj invasion of the Tarn Valley, or if they escaped to safety in the Eaves of Peytaht. The fact remains that they are no longer here and show no sign of returning. Highborn pilgrims visiting

Therunin, and their Navarr guides, found the garden abandoned. It wasn't ransacked by the Druj, nothing was broken or destroyed - it was simply empty. The tools and planting beds are neatly maintained, and it shows little sign of the taint of the poisoned waters.

With the briars gone, Navarr herbalists and priests will move in and take their place. The Keeper of the Garden will receive *all* the liao produced in the garden – twelve doses going forward. It's notable that the garden is under serious threat from both the Druj and the vallorn; if either force invades the Lower Tarn Valley again it's unlikely that the garden would survive a second time.

A Peerless Future

- **This season was the final opportunity for the Highborn Assembly to express their peerless kinship with another nation**
- **The Highborn Assembly could potentially embrace this new approach to their Imperial siblings, but doing so would require a significant sacrifice**

The capacity to support other nations by expressing their kinship has run its course. The movement began in 384YE, in response to the mandate suggested by Eli, the aging custodian of Walter's Tomb that was so effectively taken up by Jared of the Sons of Couros. Eli recently passed away, his soul gone to the Labyrinth, but he lived long enough to see

Highguard take up the ideas he championed. By all accounts, he died well satisfied by what the nation had achieved in the years that followed, confident that he had done his part in helping to set the Empire on a more virtuous path.

The last two years have seen the Highborn explore ways to aid the Freeborn in Kahraman; aiding the Dawnish reach out to the factions in the Barrens; working with the Imperial Orcs in Skarsind to increase understanding of the Ossium septs; and helped the Marches deal with threats in the Mournwold. Reaching out to their sibling nations has presented many opportunities for the Highborn to strengthen the Empire, and sometimes themselves.

There are some who see the peerless kinship as a valuable tool not only for building the Empire but for fortifying the virtue of Imperial citizens. They suggest that if the Highborn Assembly agree with them, they might address the matter with a statement of principle at the Winter Solstice. If it received a greater majority, it might lead to an opportunity to permanently gain the power of peerless kinship. More cautious voices suggest that valuable as it is to reach out to other nations, the peerless kinship requires a significant amount of focus and organisation and that if the assembly did embrace the power permanently, they would inevitably need to sacrifice something of equivalent commitment.