

So far so fast

“Are you ready?”

Esperanza bounced nervously on her heels, considering her friend’s question. “I’ll have to be. It’s a tough crowd out there.”

Reyes clapped Esperanza companionably on the shoulder.

“Hey, you’ve got this. You worked hard for that treaty. Show them how virtuous it is, they’ll have to go for it. And if it starts to go badly wrong, just remember the plan.”

“Speak from the heart? Maybe cry a little.”

“I was going to say knock over a brazier, take a guard hostage and escape in the confusion, but your idea works too.”

Esperanza snorted. “You dick.”

“What?” Reyes grinned widely. “Just imagine it! A trio of renegade diplomats on the run! Seeking out conflicts that nobody else can resolve! Swooping in to negotiate treaties, then disappearing into the night! We’d be legends!”

“I don’t know why I bother with you, I really don’t.” Her heart bolstered, Esperanza stepped out of the waiting area towards the platform of the Arena of Virtue. The heads of families from all across Reinos stared down at her from the stepped seats, their expressions largely unreadable. Reaching the central point, she addressed the crowd. “Alright! This morning we discussed the material conditions that might cause difficulties for this treaty. This afternoon we face the question, is this the Virtuous course of action to take? I say that it is. So go ahead, take your shots. See how I hold up.”

There was a brief pause as the crowd waited to see who would speak up first. Then from near the back, “Just another Hierro acting like we’re children who need to be told to eat our vegetables!”

Esperanza didn't even blink. "Just another Corazon who couldn't tie their shoes without an adult to do it for them."

A ripple of laughter spread through the crowd as another voice called out. "You're just looking to take Lucero's job!"

"Yeah, and? Lucero knows I'm on his heels, that's why he made me his second to deal with the Empire. We keep each other sharp."

More laughter, then, "You just had your head turned by a pretty human boy!"

Esperanza didn't even look to see who had called out. "Better than you getting your head turned by an especially attractive sheep. Look," she continued as the cries went back and forth, "you're going to need to do better than this. I'm not some rookie who's going to crack at a few choice insults. Give me the hard stuff, I can take it."

One of the orcs near the front sat forward, suspicion in his eyes. "You've wanted to join the Empire for years. How can we trust that this is for our benefit, not theirs?"

"See, that's what I'm talking about. Yes, I argued to take the offer back in the day. I'm not ashamed of it. But in case you didn't notice, when the rest of you chose differently, I left with you and I've stuck with you all since. I could be Empress right now if I'd joined the Unshackled, but instead I'm here, trying to drag your arses into the future."

The light-hearted mood from earlier was quickly dissipating. Another of the crowd spoke up. "In what world is this not a betrayal of our loyalty to the Jotun?"

Esperanza glared at the speaker. "The Jarls have agreed to every step of this process, as you know perfectly well. And need I remind everyone here that the only reason we ended up taking the Choice is because the Jotun conquered us, something the Empire has never done! They've been better hosts to us than we could have any reason to expect and I will

never forget that, but let's not get misty-eyed about loyalty when they're still squatting in the Cantera and won't give it back to us."

"Quiet in front!" A cry went up from some of the seats as eyes turned to an ancient, bone-white orc, swathed in blankets even in the middle of the day. Esperanza watched her hands slowly sign out her statement as a translator projected their words across the arena.

"Consuelo wishes it to be known that she respects your judgement Esperanza, and she respects the work you have put in to making this treaty happen. But more than any of us, she has seen the Empire's brutality. Her children lie dead in the ground because of Imperial soldiers. Our ancestral lands still rest in their hands. After everything they have done to us, every wrong they have committed, how can we possibly set that aside? How can we ever count them as friends?"

This was a big one. Esperanza took a long breath. "I thank Consuelo for her respect, and wish her to know that I and everyone else here deeply respects her work on behalf of our people. I mourn those we have lost in these wars, including members of my own family. But the dead are dead, and we are alive. They have faced the abyss, and are beyond such concerns. We are alive, and we need to ask ourselves, do we want our own children to continue this same cycle of blood and violence? We must preserve our Pride, but we must also be Vigilant in case we miss the chance to build the future our Ambition demands! Consider this deal! Our lands returned to us. Our borders defended by the Courage of Imperial armies. Temples to our virtuous ancestors built by Imperial white granite, while Imperial trade grows our Prosperity. Let us show Loyalty to those who come after us by turning our oldest enemies into our newest friends! Let us have the Wisdom to face this unknown trail, and to follow it to see where it leads."

A soft hubbub of voices arose all across the arena. Esperanza looked around, trying her hardest not to focus too much on

Reyes practically jumping for joy off to one side. It had been a good speech, but it would take more than one of those to push this treaty to its conclusion.

Overview

In Autumn 386YE, a party of diplomats from the Lasambrian Orcs visited Anvil to discuss peace with the Empire. While the exact details of what occurred are known only to those who were present, it seems that a treaty that both sets of negotiators were willing to accept was drafted. Since then, there has been a flurry of messages back and forth between the Lasambrians and the Imperial Civil Service, as well as the Lasambrians and their Jotun allies. Details of the latter discussions are once again unknown, but some time before the Winter summit, the word is sent: in principle, all parties are willing to accept this treaty.

The Lasambrians have, as a people, discussed the treaty and accepted it in principle. It falls far short of what they would want, but it does give them enough land to form a nation of their own. Of course, that comes at a heavy price that would have to be paid by the Freeborn whose land they claim. But the nation has - grudgingly - accepted this deal.

The only remaining hurdle is the approval of the relevant Imperial bodies of state. To become law, the Imperial Senate would need to pass the treaty with a constitutional vote, and it would still be subject to veto by the General Assembly and the Assembly of the Nine.

The Text

Copies of the proposed treaty have been widely disseminated by the civil service so that all citizens may be aware of what is being proposed.

THE TREATY OF LASAMBRIA

Diplomatic Status

- This treaty is between the Casinean Empire and the nation of Lasambria, which we recognise as independent.
- The Casinean Empire will recognise the people of Lasambria as foreigners.
- Both parties commit to establishing formal diplomatic relations, with any issues to be handled by formal diplomatic channels in the first instance.
- Any citizen of the Casinean Empire or Lasambria shall be free to decide whether they wish to change their citizenship to the other nation.
- The people of Lasambria shall commit and reaffirm that they are not now and shall never be slavers.

War And Territories

- From the signing of this treaty, the armies and independent warbands of Lasambria shall assist in the reconquest of the territories of Kahraman, Segura,

Madruga and Feroz.

- At such a time as the Casinean Empire has conquered all regions of Segura, Kahraman, Madrugá and Feroz, the Empire will cede the following regions to the Lasambrians: Gambit in Kahraman, Morajasse in Feroz, and all regions of Segura.
- Any Freeborn who currently reside within any of the regions to be ceded shall have a grace period of six months from the point the regions are ceded to leave the regions with their personal and family possessions.
- For a period of three years, there shall be a mutual defence pact between the Casinean Empire and the Lasambrian Nation, which will commence once all regions have been ceded. For the purposes of this treaty, the mutual defence pact entails the provision of military assistance in the case of invasion in the territories of Reinos, Segura, Kahraman, Madrugá and Feroz.
- The Lasambrian Nation shall commit to neutrality in perpetuity in all matters of war between the Casinean Empire and the Jotun. This would entail no Lasambrian forces assisting either the Jotun or the Casinean Empire in war against the other.

Trade

- A state of mutual free trade will exist between the Lasambrian Nation and the Casinean Empire.
- The Faraden will have their trade tariffs set to Mercantile

rates by the Lasambrian Nation for as long as there is peace between the Lasambrians and the Faraden.

- For a period of three years from the signing of this treaty, the Lasambrian Nation shall be responsible for paying for the upkeep and repair of the Damatian Cliffs. In return, they shall receive the full production of the quarry.

Repercussions

Obviously, such a treaty will have significant ramifications for all parties involved if it is passed. The Imperial civil service has endeavoured to spell out the consequences of signing this treaty to the best of their ability. They are at pains to point out, however, that these are only the readily foreseeable consequences. As with all important actions, the full results will only be seen with hindsight.

A Nation Reborn

- **The treaty would create a new nation of Lasambria on the edge of the Empire**
- **The Lasambrians would be foreigners**
- **The treaty commits the Empire to the construction of an embassy and the appointment of an ambassador**

The first and most obvious result of this treaty would be the creation of a new foreign nation: Lasambria. While the Lasambrian Hills had long existed as a *de facto* state on the Empire's southwestern border, that was crushed by the joint efforts of the Jotun and the Iron Confederacy. The new

nation would control some of the same territory, but the Lasambrians are clear that they regard this as the rebirth of the old alliance that has fought battles against the Freeborn all the way back to the time of the First Empress and beyond. However its inhabitants think of it, the nation of Lasambria would be treated identically to any other nation in the eyes of Imperial law. Its inhabitants would be declared foreigners by this treaty, with all of the rights and responsibilities accorded by such status. The treaty's statement on the establishing of formal diplomatic relations would require the construction of an embassy and the appointment of an ambassador, the procedures for which are already clearly defined.

The clause spelling out the right of citizens of either nation to move between them freely is technically unnecessary from the Imperial side - there is no law that forbids Imperial citizens from leaving the Empire, nor any law that prevents foreigners from becoming citizens of any Imperial nation should they go through the required procedures to do so. This seems instead to be a statement of intent from the Lasambrians, that they will honour any such decisions from their side. It is uncertain what impact this might have, if any, in the long term, as there is no hint that any of the Lasambrians are interested in joining the Empire.

Renouncing slavery should pose little difficulty for the Lasambrians. The southern orcs survived for years through banditry, but they were never slavers like the Grendel or the

Jotun. It is notable that while the Lasambrians exact heavy taxes on foreigners who live in their lands, they do not practice the Choice of the Jotun and keep no thralls of their own.

A Military Alliance

- **The agreement commits the Lasambrians to helping the Empire reconquer the entirety of the Brass Coast**
- **The Lasambrians possess three armies and one large warband**
- **Cooperation will end once the Empire has retaken all the regions**
- **The Lasambrians have been absolutely clear that they expect the Empire to prioritise this goal**
- **If that doesn't happen, relations with the Lasambrians will quickly deteriorate**
- **The Empire cannot currently complete this goal without the assistance of a navy**
- **If Lasambrian armies enter Madruga or Feroz they will suffer attrition if they cannot trace supply lines back to Reinos through regions they control**

The commitment of the Lasambrians to assist in the reconquest of Imperial territory is not the first time that Imperial forces have cooperated with foreign orcs in recent years - the armies of the Thule have fought as allies across the northern Empire, most notably in the conquest of Ossium and Sermersuaq. While the treaty includes no practical details, presumably the Lasambrians would arrange

communication with the Imperial Military Council in order to put together a unified campaign plan.

The exact force numbers are not public knowledge, but the Lasambrians are known to field three armies: the *Hierro*, the *Corazon*, and the *Escuta*. The treaty refers to multiple independent warbands, but only one such group is large enough to be registered on the strategic scale: the followers of the youthful Shepherd-Warrior Yantan Tethrasson. The Lasambrians have confirmed this is the limit of their forces.

By the wording of the treaty, the military cooperation would continue until all regions of the four named territories - Kahraman, Segura, Madrugá and Feroz - were in Imperial hands. Currently the Empire controls all regions of Kahraman and Segura, and would need to reconquer the Great Grasses, Free Landing, and the Mysterious Swamp in Madrugá as well as Morajasse and the Cazar Straits in Feroz, fighting against both the Grendel and the Children of Wrecks. Should any regions of Segura or Kahraman be lost to hostile forces before the conquest is complete, the Lasambrians have confirmed that they would aid in retaking these regions as well.

The conduct of such a joint campaign would necessarily be a matter for the Military Council to direct. However, the Lasambrians are very clear that they expect that such a campaign would be commenced with all practical haste should the treaty be passed. Should they believe the Empire to be

dragging its heels unnecessarily in prosecuting this war, then diplomatic relations would turn increasingly sour.

The fact that the Empire is currently unable to invade either Free Landing or the Cazar Straits without the aid of a navy will cause major problems. The Empire would need to find a solution to this problem before those regions are all that remains to be retaken otherwise, the Lasambrians are going to believe that the Empire has negotiated in bad faith on something it can't achieve.

Supply lines are likely to become a problem for the Lasambrians. Even though the Lasambrians would be at peace with the Empire during the joint campaign, running supply lines across foreign territory is a difficult matter. The Lasambrians could readily run supply lines into Segura and Kahraman if necessary (nobody needs to mention the number of times they have done so already), but pushing through those lands into Madruga and Feroz would be incredibly difficult. Unless the Lasambrians controlled regions that allowed them to trace a route back to the territory of Reinos, then they would suffer attrition due to lack of supply in Madruga or Feroz. This is not a situation that the Lasambrians are keen to get into - many are wary of rogue elements within the Empire attempting a surprise attack should they become vulnerable.

A Gift of Land

- **The price of military cooperation is the territory of Segura and the regions of Gambit in Kahraman and Morajasse in Feroz**
- **Segura contains a number of very valuable assets and the Iron Qanat which is crucial to the supply of Freeborn armies**
- **Morajasse contains the Spice Gardens of Feroz and the seat of the Incarnadine Satchel**
- **At the point where the Senate moved to cede Segura, Gambit or Morajasse, it could be vetoed by the Freeborn Assembly**
- **If the land was not ceded the Military Council could allow the Lasambrians to conquer the land**
- **This strategy would be reliant on unanimity from the generals of the Military Council**
- **Any citizens who continued to operate their resources in Segura would suffer the conquered territory penalties**

Upon the completion of the reconquest of the Brass Coast, this treaty requires the ceding of all of Segura, as well as Gambit in Kahraman and Morajasse in Feroz. While Gambit contains no strategic resources beyond the personal property of the Freeborn who live there, Morajasse is home to both the fortification of Mora's Rock and the legendary Spice Gardens of Feroz and is the seat of the Incarnadine Satchel. As such, the Keeper of the Spice Gardens would lose access to their bounty of herbs and spices (again), and the offices of the

Satchel would be permanently lost.

The ceding of Segura would put the Ilium seat of the Cerevado Nets and all the infrastructure commissioned by the Empire, including the Towers of Anduz in the hands of the Lasambrians. It would also put the current Faraden Embassy in the hands of the orcs. The civil service are clear that an Imperial embassy cannot be maintained in foreign territory, regardless of whether those foreigners are friendly to the Empire or not, and advise that this situation would need to be taken care of with all due haste should this territory be ceded. Most importantly of all, Segura contains the Iron Qanat which is essential for the supply of Freeborn armies.

No treaty can bind the hands of future senators, and as such, the ceding of the land would require a separate Senate motion when it happened. That motion could be vetoed by the General Assembly, the Assembly of Nine or the Freeborn National Assembly. If the Senate did not pass the motion or it was vetoed then the land would not be ceded. This would do enormous damage to the Empire's reputation for trustworthiness, which has slowly recovered and improved in recent years.

In theory, the damage could be mitigated if the Imperial Military Council elected not to defend the territory from the Lasambrian advance. Such a strategy would be reliant on unanimity in the Military Council as any individual general could take their army

to Segura to oppose the attack, and the action would be completely legal. It would however have serious negative consequences for the people who live there. When land is ceded, the civil service ensure that the Imperial citizens who dwell in the affected areas are duly informed and do everything possible to help them evacuate the area. None of that aid would be forthcoming if the land was invaded and instead people might die trying to defend their homes from the advancing Lasambrian armies.

The grace period for the departure of the Freeborn inhabitants of these lands is the cause of some discussion between the Civil Service and their Lasambrian counterparts. The Lasambrians are quick to assure the Empire that they will not do any harm to any Freeborn who choose not to leave their ancestral homes. Instead, the grace period will give the Freeborn time to set their affairs in order before the Lasambrians impose the higher rate of taxation that applies to foreigners who live in their lands. However, the Civil Service would withdraw all but the most basic of support upon the territory being ceded, meaning that any Freeborn taking advantage of this grace period would still take penalties to their personal resources for living in conquered territory.

A Prosperous Future

- **The Imperial Senate would lose the taxation from Segura, Gambit and Morajasse**
- **Trade with the Lasambrians would provide a small gain**

to the Imperial treasury'

- **Improved Trade with the Faraden could provide a small gain to the Imperial treasury'**
- **The Lasambrians have a long history of war with the Faraden**
- **Giving operation of the Damatian Cliffs to the Lasambrians would require a constitutional vote to pass the Senate and could be vetoed by the Assembly of Nine**

The Empire would no longer be able to collect taxes from Segura, Gambit and Morajasse. The Master of the Imperial Mint has the information on the taxation produced by the territory, but the Civil Service do confirm that Segura is an extremely wealthy territory, whose current inhabitants pay a significant amount into the Imperial treasury.

The situation would take some time to stabilise as the Lasambrians begin to exploit and trade the resources of their new homes, but eventually, the trade between them and the Empire would provide some income to the Senate. The treasury would not make as much money as it otherwise might if the Lasambrians paid mercantile tariffs, so the sums would not be large.

Currently, the Lasambrians exact heavy tolls from Faraden traders passing through their lands, which has a significant chilling effect on the overland trade between Faraden and the Empire. The Lasambrians relaxing their stance towards Faraden merchants would lead to an increase in tax revenue,

as more caravans would take the chance to sell their wares in the Empire. It is impossible to make a precise prognostication on the amounts because it is too far in the future and there are too many factors but tax income from Faraden could improve by 20% or more. Such arrangements would only last as long as peace persisted between Faraden and Lasambria. While nobody has voiced any specific plans for war, the Lasambrians have a history of conflict with the Faraden every bit as long and bloody as their wars with the Empire. Nobody can be certain what the future might hold.

For the duration of the treaty, the Damatian Cliffs would incur no upkeep costs to the Senate, and the full bounty of white granite would be given to the Lasambrians. The Lasambrians have indicated that they would not interfere with the running of the quarry in any way, allowing the families who have traditionally worked there to continue exercising their Prosperity according to their regular customs. Should this treaty be passed then the holder of the bourse seat, currently **Naomi of Felix's Watch**, would be refunded a portion of the money they bid to buy the seat from the Imperial Treasury, just as they would if the seat had been conquered.

The leasing of the Damatian Cliffs is another first in Imperial history. The proposed arrangements do not fit the legal requirements of concede that define it as a process in which all legal control is given up. It is possible to argue that the arrangements are a form of relinquishment - with the Cliffs

ceasing to be an Imperial title for the duration, but that power makes a bourse resource subject to a new vote of allocation, which cannot be the case here. Ultimately the Constitutional Court agree that it is not unconstitutional for the Senate to enact this as part of the treaty, but since the authority is equivalent to that assumed by relinquishment or concedence it must be treated the same. That means that the treaty requires a constitutional majority to pass and can be vetoed by the Assembly of Nine.

Words Unspoken

The treaty is wide-ranging in its scope and has numerous profound implications. Yet the civil service are quick to point out that the actual text of the treaty is only the beginning.

Hungry Soldiers

- **At present, losing Segura and the Iron Qanat would reduce the supply of the Freeborn to one**
- **If the underpopulated quality was removed from Feroz then the supply of the Brass Coast would be reduced to two when Segura was ceded**

The armies of the Freeborn have recently suffered from severe disruption to the upkeep of their armies. This treaty raises the spectre what will happen after Segura was ceded. In this case, the numbers are ominous. The Freeborn have been able to support three armies only because they controlled four territories. Indeed, even this by itself was not enough, and the

Iron Qanat was required to allow Segura to increase the supply of the Freeborn armies. While the loss of single regions of Kahraman and Feroz would be survivable, the loss of the entire territory of Segura would not. With things as they stand now, the loss of Segura and the Iron Qanat would mean the Freeborn would only be able to support a single army.

This problem has been compounded by the devastation left by Rahab in Feroz. A fully functioning and healthy Feroz would contribute only so much to the Imperial war effort, but in its current state its contribution is badly curtailed. If the problems of underpopulation in Feroz could be resolved before Segura was ceded (or after) then the Freeborn would be able to support two armies.

Shared Virtue

- **Lasambrians pursue the seven Virtues but they do not follow the Way**
- **It would require a drastic change of circumstances for the Lasambrians to convert to the Way**

The Lasambrians are deeply committed to their faith, and the seven Virtues have rapidly come to permeate all aspects of their society. This common faith has helped to bring them to the negotiating table and will likely form the bedrock of any future relations between Lasambria and the Empire.

However these similarities only go so far. The Lasambrians embrace the Virtues wholeheartedly, but have no interest

whatsoever in the Doctrines of the Way. Those who have interacted with them describe the Lasambrians as deeply anti-clerical, rejecting the authority of the Imperial Synod and having no corresponding religious body themselves. While they acknowledge that there are some whose knowledge of the Virtues is greater and more worth listening to, there is a strong and pervasive belief in their society that each individual must seek a deep and personal understanding of the Virtues within themselves.

As such, the Lasambrians might notice statements in the Imperial Synod, they would have no power to sway them in their beliefs. They are on their own path towards Virtue, and while they might engage in mutual discussion, they would certainly not take kindly to any attempts to tell them that they are doing it wrong. It would take a drastic change of circumstances for the Lasambrians to embrace the Way.

The Jotun Question

- **The Lasambrians claim the Jotun are prepared to allow them to leave the nation**
- **The Jotun have confirmed this unusual state of affairs but provided no reasoning for their actions**
- **Accepting this treaty will not damage relations with the Jotun**
- **Betraying the Lasambrians would outrage the Jotun**
- **Keeping faith with the Lasambrians would help the Empire prove that it can be trusted**

- **The Lasambrians are adamant that the Jotun will never convert to the Way**

The Empire recently devoted the work of the Prognosticator's Office to appraising the possibility of peace with the Jotun. Naomi of Virtue's Rest identified the possibility of this treaty in her assessment of the Jotun. While the Lasambrians are held apart from the rest of the Jotun by their faith and their heritage, they are still accepted by their more northerly brethren as being Jotun - at least for now. This treaty would bring an end to that relationship - the Lasambrians would no longer be part of the Jotun nation.

The Lasambrians claim to have negotiated their own treaty with the Jotun, which will come into force if the Empire commits to their part of the process. It is not clear *why* the Jotun would simply permit the Lasambrians to leave - taking three Jotun armies with them - but the Lasambrians are adamant that they have agreed to it. It is impossible to be confident of the full impact that these negotiations might have on the Jotun given that the Empire has no information on their reasoning.

What is clear is that these negotiations and the treaty if it happens, won't make matters worse. In the absolute worst case scenario - that the Lasambrians are lying about the Jotun acceptance of their wish to leave - then the Jotun will be furious with the Lasambrians. They won't blame the Casinean Empire which can reasonably claim that the Lasambrians

stated that they had Jotun agreement to leave. The Grendel, the Thule or the Druj would react very badly to these negotiations, but the Jotun sense of honour sets the tone for all diplomatic relations with them.

Naomi's report identified the many complex and interlocking factors that have kept the Empire and the Jotun in a state of war in recent years, and it will take a lot more than one successful negotiation to significantly shift that balance. However, the Empire's conduct here will be noted by the Jarls of Kalsea and Narkyst. There are still some among the Jotun who claim that the Empire are fundamentally treacherous and untrustworthy. A clear demonstration that the Empire can give and stick to its word will help Imperial negotiators push back against this perception.

What would enrage the Jotun is if the Empire betrayed the Lasambrians. Such a move would likely rebound to the advantage of the Jotun nation - as the Lasambrians would bend the knee to them again, taking their armies with them. However, Naomi of Virtue's Rest stresses that such actions would outrage the Jotun sense of honour and would only make them less likely to sue for peace at some point in the future.

There is some discussion on the role of religion in the relationship between the Lasambrians and the Jotun. The Lasambrians are quite open in their belief that the Jotun would be better off if they were to convert to the Virtues and

reorganise their society accordingly, but they are clear that they do not believe the Jotun would ever adopt the virtues. The entirety of Jotun society is constructed around their religious views, their political system, their economy, their military system - all of it is based on their religious beliefs. Abandoning them would hurl the nation into chaos. The Lasambrians have tried to convert the Jotun to the Virtues and apart from a few isolated individuals, they have received only a cold shoulder. The Jotun will never adopt the Way.

The Iron Fist

- **The treaty commits the Empire to the defence of the Lasambrian territories of Reinos and Segura for three years**
- **The Iron Confederacy have attacked the Lasambrians in the past and would like nothing more than to conquer Segura**
- **The Imperial civil service believe the Confederacy have at least as many armies as the Jotun, if not more**

The terms of the treaty include a mutual defence pact for the territories of Reinos, Segura, Kahraman, Madruga and Feroz for three years once all regions have been ceded. The Empire would be entitled to military aid from the Lasambrians if their territories in the Brass Coast were attacked. It is clear from discussion with the Lasambrians that they view this as the provision of armies to assist with the defence of these lands.

The cost for this benefit is reciprocity. If the Empire sign the

pact they are publicly committing to the provision of military assistance to aid the Lasambrians if they are attacked by their neighbours. Offers to defend a neighbour have not gone well for the Empire in the past - the defence of Faraden was a major factor in dragging the Empire into the more recent war with the Jotun. The phrase 'military assistance' is vague and puts no specific requirements on the nature of such assistance, but the Lasambrians are clear that they would expect both parties to make a 'good faith effort' to protect their allies in the event that this clause is activated. The treaty doesn't specify what form this military assistance must take, but the Lasambrians are clear that they would expect the same level of assistance that they can offer - three armies - as the minimum.

The nature of the pact is specifically one of defence - the Lasambrians are clear that they would not expect the Empire to assist them should they invade the lands of any other nations, nor would they assist the Empire in any such offensive campaigns of their own. The Lasambrians would have three other neighbours besides the Empire once this treaty is passed. The Lasambrians are confident that the Jotun won't attack them in the immediate future and it is hard to imagine that the Faraden would launch an attack on a nation in a defence pact with the Empire. That would be a disaster for them.

However the Iron Confederacy are a serious threat. They allied

with the Jotun to launch a full on invasion to split the lands the Lasambrians held between them. It is difficult to know what motivates the Suranni, but two things are clear - they have no love for orcs and they would dearly love to claim the wealthy territory of Segura as their own. If they invaded Lasambria the Empire would be forced to choose between breaking their pact with the Lasambrians or risking all out war with the Iron Confederacy.

To compound this, the Iron Confederacy control the territory that the Lasambrians know as Kalino and the Suranni have renamed to Arbonne. The Lasambrians are not blind to the power imbalance between them and their southern neighbours, but their Pride still stings at the loss and their Ambition is as keen as ever. A unilateral war against the Iron Confederacy would be tantamount to suicide, but if the Empire were to back them, then they would dearly love to restore their ancestral holdings. It is unlikely that such agitations would begin immediately, but if recent history has proved anything it is that the Lasambrians can be very single-minded.

Nobody knows exactly how big a threat the Suranni are, but their diplomats always bristle at any suggestion that they are not the equal of the Empire. They don't have a substantial naval force, but they do maintain a large number of armies, at least as many as the Jotun if not more.

An Eleventh Nation

- **The Proud and Ambitious Lasambrians will never join the Empire**

Some years ago, the Hierro clan were offered a deal: they would be given Segura, but on the condition that they become the eleventh nation of the Empire. The details of the discussions among the Hierro that followed this offer are not known to the Empire, but in the end the decision was made to reject the offer. A similar situation emerged with the Jotun; while the Hierro and the Corazon both accepted the Choice, they nonetheless held themselves apart from their compatriots. Indeed, rather than being absorbed into the Jotun, the Lasambrians instead converted the sept once known as the Deep Bloods, reconnecting them with their ancient ancestors and restoring their identity as the Escuta. Whatever the circumstances, the Lasambrians have very pointedly held onto their independence.

Any suggestion that an independent Lasambria might be persuaded to accept the offer that the Hierro once refused is unjustified. Although the treaty would bind them closely to the Empire both militarily and economically, to say nothing of the fact that they would be the only other nation on the continent that follows the seven Virtues, there is no chance that they would join the Empire now. The Virtues have filled them with Pride, Ambition and Courage. As a result, there is no possibility that they would flip their allegiance in the way that

the Apulians did, or join the Empire in the way Holberg or even Urizen did.

Their resistance to the influence of the Synod has already been discussed. On top of all of this, the Lasambrians simply do not like the idea of being told what to do. Obeying the laws of the Senate, the Doctrines of the Synod, the numerous restrictions that every Imperial Nation must accept in order to maintain social order - these things would be intolerable to a people still finding themselves after generations of disconnection from their culture. The one thing the rebirth of their nation is guaranteed not to do is to make the Lasambrians less attached to their independence. While nobody can be sure what the future may hold, the Lasambrians will not entertain any notion of closer union with the Empire unless the situation were drastically altered.

The Final Roll of the Die

- **The Lasambrians believe they have negotiated in good faith with the Empire and give significant ground, this deal represents their full and final offer**
- **There will be no further negotiations with them if the Empire reject this final attempt at a treaty**

Considerable time has been spent negotiating this treaty with representatives of the Empire at Anvil. There has been horse trading on both sides, but the Lasambrians hope that they now have the basis for a deal with the Empire. The terms of the deal have been approved by the nation and they have an

agreement in principle with the Jotun to depart their nation. The only signature that is still required for this treaty to come into effect, is that of the Empire.

The Lasambrians are clear that they will not negotiate further at this point. There is a deep well of cynicism among some of the older Lasambrians that the Empire will try to insist on further negotiations and modifications to the treaty as a way to extract further concessions, or that they will delay signing the treaty in an attempt to claim some justification for reopening talks. The Lasambrians are utterly resolved not to go down that path. They would like to sign a treaty with the Empire, but if this attempt fails then the attempt will be their last. If the Senate does not pass this treaty then the Lasambrians are adamant that they will not return to Anvil to negotiate again until they have taken all their lands by force.

One Last Thing

- **Cathan Canae is likely to consider ceding land to the Lasambrians as a show of weakness**
- **A plenipotentiary would give the Empire a chance to convince the eternal that this was not a defeat for the Empire**

Finally, the civil service received a request from **Chauntecleer Words**, noted seneschal of Dawn, to investigate how a response from the Lady of the Frost might look to this treaty. Having discussed the matter with one of her heralds, it is clear that the *Queen of Ice and Darkness* is likely to decide that

ceding land to the Lasambrians would be a show of weakness by the Empire and react accordingly. Whilst there is no certainty what the reaction would look like, it would not be possible for *Breath of Winter* to remove the ability for Imperial ritualists to call citadels from her demesne; it would not break the assurance of the ritual.

The Archmage of Summer could use a plenipotentiary to ask Cathan Canae for an audience to discuss the matter. It might be possible for the Empire to persuade *The Immovable One* to change her mind, but there is no certainty of success.

Cathan Canae is unlikely to care what treaties the Empire signs - she will only care at the point where the Empire actually cede the land. She might care if the Empire break their word, but such a thing is more likely to be an issue to the Sovereign-Lords of the Labyrinth.

The scrivener laid back in their chair, the fine sheet of paper falling softly to the table. Outside the little office, the hustle and bustle of Anozel barely made enough noise to cover their faint groan.

"It's unconstitutional then?"

Leonardo let out a hollow laugh, straightening their back and glancing at their visitor, who was already beginning to regret coming in person.

"Unconstitutional? No, no, there's no insuperable barriers here. The chief magistrates will have the final word on that, of course, but as far as I can see it's fine for this thing to go before the Senate."

Ishman fidgeted nervously with the watch around his neck, consciously not checking it to avoid an appearance of rudeness. "Then... what's the problem?"

With a sudden, decisive motion, Leonardo swung to their feet and began to pace around the room. "Well, other than the obvious... that the costs are utterly horrendous... look. There are questions about army supply. There are questions about the Suranni. There are questions about what the future between Lasambria and the Empire would look like - what the people of this nation would think if this contract were signed. This could be the most impactful treaty of my lifetime. It would change the face of this part of the world - permanently. It's a bold, ambitious, brazen play."

They paused next to a window, looking out onto streets which only a decade ago had been clogged with tent after tent of armed soldiers. As the Secretary General turned around again, a resigned expression painted their face as they gestured around the room at row upon row of neatly filed reports, letters and contracts.

"The problem, my friend, is that if this goes ahead, I need to get this lot moved out of here before property prices crash. Have you got Graciana's report about Feroz to hand?"