

According to principle

Araälin checked her gear one last time. Cudgel. Manacles. Writ of authorisation. Sigil of the Watch. Sword for emergencies, which she hoped never to draw. Everything in its place. Beside her, Theo, Garist, and Lehm were doing the same. From the old (allegedly abandoned) house ahead of them came the sound of singing. Half a dozen people, voices raised in praise. It was the signing that had first raised the alarm - overheard by a man walking his dogs in the cold moonlight last week. There was nothing wrong with singing as such, but when it comes from a derelict structure in a rural area it is all too often a cause for concern. Now, here was Araälin and her squad, to see just how bad it was.

They were going into a dangerous location, and there was one final precaution to take. Garist handed out the pots of soul honey. They clasped hands for a moment, a little awkwardly, then opened the tubs and began to smear the white buttery substance on cheeks, forehead, wrists. As always Araälin found her mind slipping back to that Summer in Darhochlindorf, her first at university. To the rose garden near the river, and the quiet nights reading, reciting, laughing. The sensation lasted only a moment, then her head cleared completely and she took a deep breath, held it, released it. The sense of knowing exactly who she was and what she was doing was profound. Beside her Lehm muttered the words of Professor Menkh - "only by my will is my heart moved." Three times, and then they were ready to move.

Theo went first, iron boots against the double doors, enchanted shield at the ready. There were shouts and gasps from inside the rickety house. The only light was a lantern set in the middle of an old table, illuminating a semi-circle of frightened faces. Papers and writing materials were spread across it, along with several finished booklets, amateurishly

stitched together. As soon as they were across the threshold, though, Araälin felt it pressing against her will. A profound sense that she should act without fear of consequence, that she should change the world to fit what *she* thought was right, that because she felt something that was the same as it being a fact. She swallowed a little bile. No wonder these people were so twisted up, she thought, if this is what they voluntarily embraced.

The soul honey was doing its job, keeping her self safe from outside interference. She raised the writ as Lehm and Garist opened their light cages to illuminate the scene more clearly and Theo stood ready to intercept anyone who tried to run.

"You are all under arrest," she said. "On suspicion of practicing dark witchcraft on the people of Kohlberg. Creating and distributing cursed objects intended to spread chaos and confusion; attempting to enforce your selfish will on your neighbours without their knowledge; and disrupting the business of Kohlberg council with manipulative enchantments. Please do not attempt to run; if you surrender now you will be dealt with fairly and justly."

She knew they weren't going to come quietly, even before the first of them - their leader - a woman she vaguely recognised as the head of the town butcher's guild - raised the lantern above her head.

"This for your fairness and justice!" She shouted dramatically, and flung the lantern at Araälin. It hit Theo's enchanted shield, splashing burning oil in all directions. Some of the straw on the floor caught immediately.

"The tyranny of the majority is still tyranny!" shouted the witch - Araälin would not think of her as a priest - drawing an axe-like cleaver. "Do not fear to act, siblings! Be shamed only by inaction in the face of these tyrants!"

Their eyes glowing with the fervour of zealots, lost in the narcotic madness of justice and righteousness, the witches

charged the guards. Araälin drew her cudgel as her fellow constables did the same, and she uttered a quiet hope inside her head that they might be able to save some of these poor people from the madness that consumed them.

Overview

Each season the Civil Service prepares a summary of the Empire's relationship with the foreign nations, based on communications received from their ambassador, along with any useful intelligence gathered from other sources. While the Senate and the other houses of Imperial power may respond to these offers, it is important to note that it is the appropriate ambassador that the foreign power will expect to hear from. Their communication with the foreign power is the primary element that will determine the tenor of any response.

The Commonwealth are a militaristic nation committed to the idea of ensuring the greatest good to the greatest number of people. They are perhaps the closest allies the Empire has among the great powers of the known world. This is in no small part due to their membership of the Liberty Pact, dedicated to destroying the abhorrent practice of slavery across the world. Both nations are dedicated to extending their influence over the whole world, and know that only one of them can fulfil their grand ambition, but for now their rivalry with the Empire remains amicable. The Empire shared their mastery of magic with the magicians of the Commonwealth, and Commonwealth soldiers fought and died alongside the Freeborn in the fall of Siroc.

The Commonwealth ambassador to the Empire is *Militärattache Ludkhannah Schöningen*, of die Stahlhalle in the port-city of Volkavaar, a veteran soldier who reports to the generals who hold the reins of political power in their nation. An old campaigner, they generally speak plainly and as honestly as any politician can when dealing with their Imperial counterpart.

Commonwealth

- **Status:** Foreigner
- **Ports:** Leerdam and Volkavaar
- **Ambassador:** Lucia Sanguineo Rezia di Tassato of the League

Quotations

In a couple of places Militärattache Ludkhannah Schöningen has specifically quoted sections of communications from the Imperial Ambassador, or other correspondents, in her replies. These are taken directly from the text of the Winged Messenger, and as much as possible seem to be used to provide additional context and without modification.

The Lantir War

- The Commonwealth and Jarm are both engaged in open warfare over the smaller nation of Lantir
- The Commonwealth are disappointed that the Senate

did not grant leave for military captains to support the war against the Jarmish

While they remain absolutely committed to their philosophical goal - of bringing the entire world under the banner of the Common Good - the Commonwealth is primarily concerned at the moment with their war with the Principalities of Jarm. In purely military terms, the Commonwealth would have the upper hand, but the Jarmish more than make up for their deficit with their consummate mastery of magic.

Open warfare erupted after years of sabre rattling thanks to the two nations having opposing interests in Lantir - a tiny landlocked country between the two rival great powers. The Lantiri rose up against their hereditary wizard-nobles, inviting the Commonwealth to become their patrons. The furious magician families looked to their Jarmish allies to help them take back "their" nation from the mob. The fight that began within the borders of Lantir did not remain contained for long, spreading like wildfire to engulf several other small buffer states between the two juggernauts. It shows no sign of abating any time soon; any hope of a swift resolution has long since been set aside by the military commanders on both sides.

At the moment, the Empire is not offering direct support to either side. Militärattache Schöningen remains optimistic, although it is notable that any talk of bringing the Jarmish to the negotiating table by the New Year has been quietly

dropped.

The Provider and the Professors

The head of the visiting delegation, Professor Immanuel Gelberg, is happy to receive letters from Imperial academics. A Winged Messenger sent during the Winter Solstice to Professor Gelberg, General Benbow Inn, Cigno, Sarvos will reach them; after that communication is likely to be more sketchy. They are particularly keen to hear from fellow academics, and representatives of the Empire's colleges of higher education..

- **Militärattache Ludkhannah offers commendations to a citizen of Wintermark named Gisli Baerson**
- **Their donation has inspired a group of Commonwealth scholars and philosophers to visit the Empire**

Some of this optimism with regard to the war could be laid at the door of **Gisli Baerson** of Wintermark, named "the Provider". Ludkhannah mentions them specifically in several dispatches, and offers them a commendation on behalf of the Commonwealth generals. They apparently provided a generous gift of mana and coin to help in the war against the corrupt mageocracy. The funds Gisli provided are a drop in the ocean in economic terms, but it is what they represent that has created interest among those Commonwealth citizens aware of them. The Empire is ruled by laws that restrict how its citizens can engage with each other and the wider world - something the Commonwealth respects. It would be a crime for Imperial captains to travel to the east to fight and kill

foreigners - the Empire is not at war with Jarm. But the Empire is wealthy, and that wealth lies in its citizens. Gisli has presented an opportunity to the leaders of the Commonwealth, and the professors at the university of Volkavaar have put forward a proposal as to how that wealth might aid the war effort.

There are already a number of Commonwealth citizens in the Empire including *Ingenieurin Hellebrant*, overseeing the creation of the *diplomatenschloss* in Necropolis. Shortly before the Winter Solstice, the *Bemühen*, a Commonwealth warship, appears at the Sarvos docks. It disembarks a group of some thirty or so citizens, and immediately turns around and heads back toward the Sea of Steel. It is not a small group - all told, there are thirty academicians, scholars, engineers, logisticians, and philosophers along with a dozen secretaries, scribes, and aides. They are drawn from the faculties of half a dozen universities. Their leader *Professor Immanuel Gelberg* is a respected political philosopher, and is here to offer the services of Commonwealth academia to their Imperial friends, starting with Gisli Baerson.

It is quickly apparent that this is not some trivial sabbatical; this group of scholars represents a serious resource. In the Commonwealth, the universities provide many of the services the Imperial civil service, Senate, and Synod provide to the Empire. They present proposals and opportunities for discussion by the generals, and having a certain amount of

autonomy when it comes to civilian commissions and projects aimed at improving the greater good. Professor Gelberg has drawn together some of the finest civilian advisors in their country, with the aim of eventually raising funds to help the Commonwealth war effort - by providing the equivalent of an appraisal to the citizens of the Empire.

die Beurteilung

- **Following the Winter Solstice Gisli Bearson can request that the Commonwealth scholars provide the equivalent of an appraisal**
- **Starting with the Spring Equinox, Professor Gelberg proposes to auction this capacity to Imperial citizens**

The first *Beurteilung* is offered to Gisli Bearson in recognition of his generous donation to the Commonwealth. Gisli may send a winged messenger to *Professor Gelberg, the General Benbow Inn, Cigno, Sarvos* detailing a matter they would like the academics to look into. The thrust of the research should be clear, and should investigate a specific subject, with a view to identifying opportunities that exist to influence the situation. Immanuel is not concerned about the scope of the proposal, it is possible to commission broad research into a significant topic such as "fortifying the borders of the Empire" or into something very specific such as "Uses for the ruined Runeforge in Gildenheim". Provided that the commission clearly identifies a known problem or a current situation, the visiting academics will find a way to provide some insight. And

if they absolutely can't find any way to tackle the named problem, they'll come up with something that is as close as they can get.

Unlike the Prognosticators Office, however, Professor Gelberg and their companions are not part of the Imperial civil service. There may be areas where they are unable to gain access - nobody is under any obligation to cooperate with them. Immanuel is broadly unconcerned with this restriction however - they are confident that their outsider's perspective will still prove valuable "*even if we are reduced to peering at the problem through a spyglass from a different island!*"

Just as with the Prognosticators Office, however, the Commonwealth scholars intend to make the result of their appraisal public. They have already engaged a printing house in Sarvos to let them produce an account of their findings. They are, apparently, quite excited by the possibilities and are already sending correspondence to their Imperial peers at places of higher learning across the Empire asking for advice and establishing contacts. They have also been in communication with the civil service.

Starting at the Spring Equinox 387YE, Professor Gelberg plans to offer the services of themselves and their companions to Imperial citizens prepared to donate money to the Commonwealth war effort. They have asked that the civil service arrange an auction, with the service on offer being an

appraisal by Gelberg and their fellow academicians. They intend to remain in the Empire for a year at least, but if their appraisal is raising sufficient funds for the Commonwealth war effort, they may extend their stay.

If the Imperial Senate wishes to take advantage of this offer, they will need to enact a suitably worded Senate motion welcoming Professor Gelberg and their fellows, inviting them to offer their expertise to the Empire, and instructing the civil service to fully cooperate with them. Such a motion will help smooth their way in dealing with more suspicious elements of the Empire, and make it easier for them to secure cooperation (and lodgings). All the money raised by auctioning the appraisal will go to the Commonwealth; the civil service are of the opinion that as long as each auction raises around thirty or forty thrones they will be more likely to stay in the Empire until they are called home. If it consistently raises less, they are likely to consider their expertise more valuable at home and return home early.

The civil service have raised some points in response to the offer. Enacting an appraisal, even in a limited capacity, will likely see Professor Gelberg and their fellows travel all over the Empire and "poke their noses" into any number of nooks and crannies. Depending on the nature of the appraisals they might learn as much about the Empire as the Empire learns from them - perhaps more. There are likely some events or places that, were Commonwealth academics to visit or explore

them, might not cast the Empire in the best light. There's no suggestion that the academics are spies, but they *are* loyal Commonwealth citizens with all that that implies.

Outside Looking In

The Prognosticators Office is very good at performing appraisals, and has the backing of the civil service and many civilian experts. Professor Gelberg's expedition have a great deal of expertise but their knowledge of the Empire is broadly academic. Any appraisal they perform will likely provide interesting or useful insight into a situation or problem, but it's not likely to produce the sheer volume of opportunities the Prognosticator's Office provides. It will certainly provide at least one opportunity to engage with the matter they have been asked to look into, but it's unlikely to produce an entire wind of fortune the way an appraisal by the Prognosticators Office does each season.

Diplomatenschloss Blues

- **The Commonwealth is pleased to hear that the Empire has started work on building a new embassy**
- **The Commonwealth engineer assisting with the project remains concerned about the proximity of the Jarmish embassy**

Construction on a new *diplomatenschloss* continues. While most of the weirwood has been provided, there is still a significant amount of white granite required. The

fortified embassy will replace the one destroyed during the Grendel attack on Madrugá. *Poldi Hellebrant*, the respected Commonwealth siege engineer, oversees the construction from quarters in the Highborn town of Hedra, in Necropolis.

Ingenieurin Hellebrant continues to express serious concerns about the proximity of the Jarmish embassy at Cargo. While she remains professional, she has written several letters expressing her worry that having both Commonwealth and Jarmish vessels plying the Couros river on the way to their respective embassies might present an opportunity for mischief that eastern magicians will be unable to ignore. It is, obviously, a little late to try and move the diplomatsenschloss, which is partially completed. Poldi Hellebrant's proposal - that the Empire just shuts down the Jarmish embassy in Cargo and moves them to some draughty offices in a swamp somewhere - is broadly seen as unconstructive.

She also has some concerns about the Sternenmetal Tower; the ambassador has offered assurance that work on the ilium and mana exchange will begin shortly. Poldi believes a lot is riding on this construction, given that the Commonwealth's enemies have a seemingly bottomless reserve of crystal mana to fuel their warlike magic. Several of her letters stress that if the tower is built where the Jarmish can observe it and divine its intent, they will surely seek some way to destroy it.

New trade

I understand all of this, plus the Asavean attacks against shipping, makes trade much more dangerous for the Commonwealth to risk ships and that resources need to focus on the Jarm war effort; if it would help, I can ask the Fleetmaster to coordinate trading fleet captains to visit the Commonwealth with goods that you need. Previously, I enquired if the Commonwealth was interested in trading artisans' items and you suggested there was some interest; if you could let me know further details, I can look into this for you.

Quoted excerpt from Ambassador Lucia's letter

- **Goods available from Commonwealth ports have changed significantly**

The continuing cost of the war means that the Commonwealth as a whole has less surplus to sell. Healing herbs are in high demand for obvious reasons, while ingots and measures are increasingly being channelled toward the construction of weapons and armour - or used by battlefield magicians in place of crystal mana. There are still markets for these goods, but prices have risen to the point where foreign merchants struggle to make a reasonable profit importing them from the Commonwealth. The Sarcophan Delves has been quick to take advantage of the shift in the Commonwealth economy, but there are also opportunities for Imperial traders visiting Leerdam and Volkavaar.

Militärattache Ludkhannah Schöningen quotes a section from Ambassador Luciana's letter, relating to trade - especially

approving of the suggestion the Imperial Fleet Master might arrange more trading vessels to visit Leerdam and Volkavaar. At the end of the day, the Commonwealth wants to entice Imperial traders to visit with holds containing the kinds of goods that can help their war effort. Every nation has their own unique merchandise, usually in high demand within its borders and only occasionally made available to foreigners. As the war escalates, Commonwealth merchants are making more and more rare goods available to visiting traders. As a consequence, the valuables available to fleets visiting the Commonwealth ports has changed almost entirely. For at least the next year, Imperial vessels visiting the Commonwealth will receive very different goods, ones that are not available in the Empire.

Leerdam

- **Imperial fleets visiting Leerdam receive a mix of goods unique to the eastern Commonwealth**
- **These include the consumables *Draught of Clear Headedness*, *Soldier's Booze*, *Soul Honey* and the ribboned item *War Amulets***
- **What combination of items a fleet will receive will be made clear at the start of downtime**

Some of the oldest, and arguably richest, cities of the Commonwealth are found in the east and Leerdam stands head and shoulders above the rest. It serves as a provincial capital, and is a centre for trade with the rest of the world.

Some of the wealthiest people in the Commonwealth are found here, maintaining elaborate townhouses and a lifestyle that might impress an Asavean noble. The Imperial Embassy is built in Leerdam, staffed by civil servants, and represents the Empire's interests in this foreign nation. Volkavaar also has a strong religious character, with the spires of the grand Cathedral of the Common Good towering over all other structures.

Following the Winter Solstice, Imperial traders visiting Leerdam will receive goods unique to the eastern Commonwealth rather than the familiar herbs, measures, and ingots that can be secured in the Empire.

- **Draught of Clear Headedness (*Klarheit*):** Known in the Gesamemanspreche as *Getränk der Klarheit*, which translates very roughly as "*Draught of Clear Headedness*", this is a tonic made with carefully refined bladeroot and marrowort, infused with water drawn from deep limestone wells, and the pressed juice of a rare mountain flower. The recipe for Klarheit is a carefully guarded secret among alpine communities dedicated to the Commonwealth state religion, but it puts some Imperial apothecary in mind of the Tisanes of the Labyrinth. It specifically enhances the ability of someone familiar with liao ceremonies to banish unwanted auras, drive away malign spirits, end hauntings, and even (it is whispered) sever spiritually awakened folk from the ability to create auras. It also has a more mundane

use - it helps clear the mind and allow one to focus despite distractions or confusion.

- **Soldier's Booze (*Soldatentrunk*)**: This tonic is apparently very popular with Commonwealth soldiers who can afford it, and many carry a draught in a metal flask inscribed with images of their home town or city. It is by all accounts created to a very old recipe, its name a somewhat quaint term that roughly translates as "*Soldier's Booze*". The herbs used to brew it are steeped in alcoholic spirits, and it is apparently possible to determine where in the Commonwealth a sample of this tonic comes from by taste alone. Drunk and savoured, this liquid acts as a powerful healing potion that also alleviates the effects of venom. While the Commonwealth have never really encountered the Druj, some soldiers who have visited the Empire joke that they could drive the orcs of the Mallum away by breathing on them after drinking enough *Soldatentrunk*.
- **War Amulets (*Kriegsamulett*)**: These metal medallions are usually fashioned of some alloy of orichalcum, with dragonbone insets and generally depicting something that is a source of pride to the people of an area - a banner design, a motto, a local hero, an animal with a particular affinity for a place. In Imperial, they would likely be called *War Amulets*, and are another item popular among soldiers; a talisman that allows them to draw on reserves of strength on the battlefield. According to Imperial artisans who have had the opportunity to examine them, they are magic items that allow someone who already knows how to deliver

a cleaving strike, mighty strikedown, or mortal blow to do so more often.

- **Soul Honey (*Seelenhonig*;)** This pale preparation has a sticky base and is composed of a kind of honey cultivated in several parts of the eastern Commonwealth. The salve it produces looks a little like white butter, but it has a distinctive smell described as "summery". Smearred on the cheeks under the eyes, across the brow, and on the backs of the wrists, "*Soul Honey*" helps strengthen the will of the one who uses it. In some ways it is similar to the effect of auras created by anointing (anathema to a nation that is deeply suspicious of auras in general), but rather than filling one with a virtuous impulse it is described as giving a profound sense of *who one is*.

Volkavaar

- **Imperial fleets visiting Volkavaar receive a mix of goods unique to the western Commonwealth**
- **These include the consumables *Hero Stone*, *Bloodclay*, *Spice Paste* and the ribboned item *Little Iron Fists***
- **What combination of items a fleet will receive will be made clear at the start of downtime**

Over the last century, a program of public works devised by the University of Volkavaar transformed the western provinces from isolated rural communities to integrated towns and cities with all the advantages that Commonwealth artisans can provide. Roads snake through dark pinewoods, sturdy stone

bridges span previously unfordable rivers, and walls of white granite encircle most settlements. Flimsy wooden structures increasingly give way to granite and weirwood structures; entire new towns have been constructed to house labourers.

Following the Winter Solstice, Imperial traders visiting Volkavaar will receive goods unique to the western Commonwealth, rather than the familiar measures, and ingots that can be secured in the Empire. The traders of Volkavaar are likewise ceasing to offer Artisan's Oil to Imperial merchants, given that the Empire can produce significant amounts of this useful material at home now they have the recipe.

- **Hero Stone (*Heldenstein*):** The western provinces of the Commonwealth are rich in white granite and weltsilver, but also some minerals unknown in the Empire. *Heldenstein* - which in Imperial would likely be called a "*hero stone*" - is a smooth golden stone that possesses magical properties. Shaped and polished, the best examples have the ability to empower certain kinds of ritual magic. It is in demand among Commonwealth magicians, but there is enough of a surplus to make it available to foreign traders. It functions a little like the *vis* all magicians are familiar with but rather than helping to perform rituals of a certain realm it provides magical energy to any Summer magic ritual that enchants an individual with greater prowess or strength.
- **Little Iron Fist (*Kleine Eisenfaust*):** The "*Little Iron Fist*" is

crusted with tempest jade, an *Eisenfaust* is a talisman constructed in the form of a ring of iron or, in some cases, an entire iron gauntlet. It is of particular use to a battle mage. As long as the attuned wearer already knows how to cast the *repel* spell they can do so an additional time each day without depleting their reserves of personal mana. There are apparently two other, increasingly potent, versions of this talisman made by Commonwealth artisans, but they are not available for sale on the open market.

- **Bloodclay (*Blutlehm*):** This deep red clay-like substance is found alongside *weltsilver* veins across the Commonwealth. It has been harvested for centuries as a useful medicinal tool in its own right, but quickly loses potency when exposed to air and sunlight. Fifty years ago a wife-and-husband team, Maria and Petrus Heiling, found a way to use *ambergelt* to preserve its useful life-giving properties. "*Bloodclay*" was the result, a thick earthy salve that even the most inept use can apply to prevent death. This consumable closes bleeding wounds and will bring anyone who is still alive back from the brink of death. It has proved very popular indeed with Commonwealth soldiers.
- **Spice Paste (*Würzpaste*):** The Commonwealth is proud of its cuisine and proud of *Würzpaste*. In Imperial, it would likely be called "*Spice Paste*" but Commonwealth purveyors say that fails to capture the specific resonance of wholesome magic it has for their people. A combination of herbs, salt, carefully shaved marrowroot root, and (if local legend is to be believed) a dash of honey from the *Wald der*

Widersprüche (the "Forest of Contradictions, a Commonwealth term for the Primal Forest). This preparation is usually sold in small pouches. Mixed with a meal - usually stew or soup - it unlocks wholesome magical properties. A person who eats an entire bowl of food sprinkled with Würzpaste finds their zest for life greatly increased, providing them with both greater endurance and fortitude at least for a time.

Asavean Privateers

- **Fewer Commonwealth vessels are trading with Imperial ports due to the bounty placed on trade with the Empire by the Asavean plenum**
- **Imperial fleets have an advantage to trade with Commonwealth ports while the bounty continues**

While the Commonwealth are enthusiastic about their trade with the Empire, the bounty placed on all ships trading with the Empire by the Asavean Plenum is impacting the number of merchants prepared to make the trip. Commonwealth ships are generally well-defended, but their fighting vessels are needed in the war against Jarm. Fending off opportunistic pirates and privateers, and the occasional well-organised pack of Asavean vessels, stretches the goodwill of their merchants. There are still Commonwealth ships reaching Imperial shores, but the amount of trade has tailed off dramatically. The efforts of the Freeborn to protect trade in the Bay of Catazar are much appreciated, but it's a long way between the Sea of Steel and the Bay and the journey remains treacherous.

Imperial fleets that trade with the Commonwealth ports continue to enjoy a small boost to their profits (gaining the equivalent of a single rank) thanks to increased demand and, consequently, profits. What precisely this means given the shift in goods available at Commonwealth ports is not entirely clear at this time.

Viyerda

Thank you for your response regarding the Viyerda; the Empire will not make contact with them..

Quoted excerpt from Ambassador Lucia's letter

- **The Ambassador has assured the Commonwealth there is no Imperial plan to interfere in Viyerda**
- **The option to send Naomi of Virtue's Rest to establish diplomatic relations remains open**
- **The moment for the Celestial Arch to act has passed however**

While exploring the northern Sea of Steel near Rachensgrab, Imperial mariners came across the tiny island nation of Viyerda. After initial cautious contact, Ambassador Luciana spoke with their opposite number about further Imperial involvement. Keen to avoid offending their allies without cause, the Commonwealth did not *technically* forbid the Empire from pursuing relations with the Viyerda. Militariche Schöningen however was reasonably clear that the Empire was not welcome to interfere with the tiny, distant nation. The Commonwealth staunchly believes that each of the members

of the Liberty Pact is responsible for relations with other nations in their sphere of influence. In response, the Imperial Ambassador has reassured their counterpart that the Empire will not make contact with them.

That said, Viyerda is not going anywhere. The Imperial Senate could choose to send Naomi of Virtue's Rest to undertake a follow-up expedition with an eye toward establishing diplomatic relations with them at any time. The moment for the Grandmaster of the Celestial Arch to act has passed however; they could ask the magicians of their order to attempt contact with their counterparts in the distant country but the opportunity to guide their order has passed.

Obviously contacting the Viyerda after the Ambassador has assured the Commonwealth the Empire does not plan to do so will upset them, and will damage the friendship between the two nations. Indeed, the reaction is likely to be *more* heated given the Ambassador's assurance.

More details of the Viyerada, as well as the specifics of the two opportunities for closer contact, are described in Summer's **A star is born** wind of fortune.

Schloss in the Mists

I wish to update you about the Lyceum & the Commonwealth's Schloss on the island, as well as the situation in Madrugá. Conclave has worked with the Eternal Sadogua, who will

extend the wards to last until Winter in 387 YE, keeping all there safe from attacks. Sadogua has also promised to look for a way to get the right people and supplies in and out.

Quoted excerpt from the Ambassadorial communication

- **The Commonwealth is pleased to be kept informed of the situation in the Lyceum and Madrugá**

The recent developments with the Lyceum have apparently left the Commonwealth magical community a little bemused, but somewhat reassured. *Lustige Kröte* (the "jolly toad") is viewed with some suspicion in the Commonwealth but just about tolerated. While he is clearly a patron of the Principalities, he is profligate with his gifts to the *Zauberer* when they are prepared to accept them. It's clear the eternal would rather see the Commonwealth run by its magicians, and that has caused problems in the past, but for the most part the *Zauberer* are good at finding ways to retain access to his boons without compromising their loyalty to the Greater Good. Still, to know that a group of *Zauberer* are in his hands is a cause for some minor concern.

On the other hand, the Commonwealth magicians at the Lyceum Schloss will eventually want to come home. It is a priority for the Militärattache that a method be found to facilitate this. She trusts the Imperial Conclave, however, to secure the transport of Commonwealth citizens through the magical mist barrier.

And Finally...

This year is the 250th year since Holberg joined the Empire. Since then Holberg has grown to become the greatest city in the League. Our people flourish in a spirit of invention, inspiration and amity. We seek to mark this auspicious anniversary with worthy celebrations. On behalf of the citizens of Holberg and our Chamber of Commerce, we would welcome you or your representative, in friendship, to join us in Anvil at the Winter Solstice to experience the best of the Empire.

Quoted excerpt from the "von Kleist" letter

- **Commonwealth visitors are intrigued by an invitation to visit the city of Holberg for its 250th anniversary**
- **The League assembly could further support this invitation but would need to clearly identify a contentious area where the League agrees with the Commonwealth**

There is one last matter. The Militärattache asks the Ambassador to pass on their regrets to **Bernhard Kleist von Ennerlund**, but they will be unable to attend the Holberg anniversary at this time. Their work leaves little time for a voyage to the Empire, much as they would be very interested to see the birthplace of one of the Commonwealth's famous children Frederick Ritter van Holberg. News of the festivities at the greatest city in the Empire is of interest to a number of Commonwealth historians and citizens. Indeed, Professor Galberg's expedition plan to make a point of visiting Holberg to view its astonishing walls and explore its markets and (hopefully) visit the University there.

Obviously, the ongoing problems with the Asavean bounty means that it is even more challenging than usual to visit the Empire but for the quarter-millennium of a great city like Holberg there are always those ready to risk it. It is quite possible that some of the Commonwealth citizens interested in paying a visit to Anvil during the Winter Solstice, perhaps during the *Feast of the Reaper*.

This invitation might represent an opportunity for the League as a whole. While **Paulus Adelaar van Holberg** has dispatched an open invitation to the citizens of the League to attend the celebrations, a particularly warm welcome for Commonwealth visitors might form the basis of closer ties with the distant nation. The League and the Commonwealth arguably have a lot in common, after all. They are both nations that look to the future rather than the past, that celebrate ingenuity and practicality, and that have a deep-seated appreciation for individual ambition, personal responsibility, and the freedom to make the most of oneself and one's nation. There are areas where the Empire and the Commonwealth do not entirely agree however.

The League Assembly could uphold a statement of principle that urged people to welcome Commonwealth guests. To be appealing to the Commonwealth however, the statement would need to either acknowledge that the League believes the search for the Common Good is an admirable goal; that some spiritual auras can impede free will which is a vital

quality of sapient beings; or that the Commonwealth's war with the Jarmish is a virtuous cause. Or, indeed, all three. If such a statement received a greater majority, and the sentiment approving of Commonwealth philosophy was clear, it would likely see the enthusiasm for the Commonwealth visitors lead to an opportunity.