



Imperial Civil Service Report

Subject: The Volodny Bas Celik.....

Report:

Bas Celik is the name of one of the volodny – the apparently undying sorcerers from early Varushkan history. Each of the volodny also has a title- in her case she is regularly referred to as “binder.”

Archival information is difficult to come by – several key tomes were destroyed during Nicovar's turbulence, but even leaving that aside written records of the volodny are thin on the ground. Several scholars assume that the Varushkan cabals have scrolls, tomes and oral lore that they have not shared with the rest of the Empire; how we might gain access to that information is difficult to say.

Much of what we do know is speculation. Two references crop up repeatedly in later works, but original copies of these sources appear nonexistent. The first is “The Forsaken of Ushk” a collection of first century BE Varushkan writings that purport to tell the stories of the volodny drawn from original Ushkan lore. The author is unknown, but an index of tomes from Ankarien suggests there were fifteen such scrolls when the library was burnt, suggesting at least fourteen volodny were described.

The second is “Travels with Uncle Pannan”, a biography of the volhov Pakaan written by his apprentice and niece Ijena and touching on their various adventures in and around Varushka with assorted sovereigns including several volodny plots. We know these books only through sections quoted in later works, and where possible have compared quoted sections to attempt to determine veracity. Included in the tome is a significant section including a discourse between Pakaan and Bas Celik at the court of the Eternal Kaela. Quoted in several secondary sources, the discourse touches on Bas Celik's early life and the motivations of the volodny.

As with many attempts to collate information about the volodny, this document is patchy and full of holes. More than one scholar has suggested that the volodny take pains to prevent anyone finding out too much about them – that they have supernatural means to tell when their secrets are being threatened – but this scholar considers that to be superstitious nonsense.



It is easy when dealing with powerful, alien threats to ascribe all sorts of additional powers to them. The volodny were men and women once and while they are clearly more (or less) than mortal now, it is inconceivable that they can detect when people are researching them and send agents to interfere! Whatever next? Will we fear to speak their names in case they hear us? This kind of idiocy has no place in scholarship, and is the kind of attitude that would have kept us cowering under the trees at night, afraid to ever leave our camp-fires in case the demons in the dark spirited us away.

Early life

The Ushka were the first human inhabitants of this land; their legends claim that they were born, fully formed, from the soil and the shadows beneath the trees. Their villages clustered together in the wilderness, prey for wolves and worse, but they had an understanding of the cruel realities of life in the forest. They made bargains with stronger powers and thus survived, although they often paid a steep price for their survival.”

Excerpt from “The History of Varushka

Like most of the volodny¹, Bas Celik was born to the Ushka tribes prior to the appearance of the Vard. She was born and lived her early life in what is now Miekarova, in the region of Mieriada. *The Forsaken of Ushk* describes the young woman as being possessed of rare insight, and a gentle nature that made her much loved in her village. She was said to be able to charm the birds and creatures of the forest, and that her singing could soothe the heart of the angry bear or hungry Wolf. She studied at the *Painted Caves* until her fifteenth year, when the Vard began their conquest of Karov. Along with several young magicians she undertook the arduous journey north to pursue studies of darker magic in the mountains of Volodmartz.

She returned home three years later, aged eighteen. *The Forsaken of Ushk* calls her as a powerful “bargainer²” skilled in the arts of Winter and Night. She used her powers to conceal Ushkan guerillas fighting the Vard, to hide villages from the “*ravenous hunger of the iron-clad wolves*” and to curse the food supplies of Vardish military camps. She is known to have regularly called forth members of Kaela's grim legion to support Ushka strikes, and to have made compacts of safe travel and support with several of the darker spirits of the Miekarovan forests.

According to *Travels with Uncle Pannan*, Bas Celik was the first of the Ushka leadership to

¹But not all of them – see the mention of Kareina of the Swans later

²“Bargainers” appear to have been a class of Ushka magician very similar to modern Varushkan cabalists – it is interesting that the tradition of the volhov appears entirely absent from Ushka histories. The idea of a magician who deals with sovereigns and other powers as an equal appears alien to the Ushka mind-set, which appears to have been much more about propitiation and compromise.



seek the aid of the creatures known as Sovereigns. She climbed the Razors in Miekarova and negotiated with the Howling Queen for her assistance. She refused to give Pakaan details of her encounter with this enigmatic horror, but when she returned from the hills she brought with her three plaguewulfs that accompanied her for most of the rest of the campaign against the Vard. These monstrous creatures not only protected the potent sorceress as she worked her magic, but ensured a steady supply of shambling husks to send against the Vard.

The Vard came to fear Bas Celik like no other Ushkan leader and several times attempted to trap and kill her. According to the story “*The Maiden and the Wolves*” they tried to kill her three times, and each time succeeded only in killing one of her plaguewulfs thanks to her clever deceptions.

The Vard were cousins to the Steirn, warlike and fierce; they came to Varushka meaning to claim the riches of the land for themselves. When the Ushka encountered the Vard, at first they tried to hide. When hiding failed they tried to make bargains with the Vard. When this too failed, they tried to fight the Vard. When the steel axes and steel shirts of the Vard meant they could not be defeated, they bowed their heads and were conquered. Rather than destroy them, the Vard offered the Ushka a place at their hearth and protection from the shadows beneath the trees. In return the Ushka shared their hard-won wisdom and helped them to survive the dangers that could not be defeated with steel alone.

Excerpt from “The History of Varushka”

Towards the end of the war, Bas Celik gathered with the scattered remnants of the Ushkan tribal leaders at the Painted Caves to determine what to do, and bitterly opposed the decision to surrender. She spoke of her frustration and hate for those who proposed peace. According to Ijena, she could not accept that her fellow Ushka might seek a peaceful resolution after fighting for so many years. Ijena speculates that Bas Celik had lost someone much beloved to the Vard – a family member or lover – but also speculates that this “loss” might have been figurative rather than literal.

I watched her as she spoke to my Uncle and I thought for a moment I detected a hint of evasiveness. She was not talking of a lover slain or a parent struck down by Vard steel. She was speaking of a figurative loss – a sister, a child, a mentor, a beloved friend who had chosen to embrace her bitter enemy rather than continue to fight. Perhaps from despair, but I thought it more likely from love – because I think Bas Celik would have understood the despair that can stop someone fighting, but never the love that might see something beautiful in the enemy.

I suggested this to my uncle after we had left that place and he chuckled and said ‘Stranger things have happened.’



But then he changed the subject and wouldn't speak of it again."

Excerpt from "The Nature of the Beast", quoting Travels with Uncle Pannan

Regardless, history recalls that the Ushka accepted the offer of peace and began the slow process of assimilation by the Vard that would eventually lead to the creation of the Varushkan people.

Bas Celik would not accept this turn of events.

There is a tale in the Vale of Gnijezdo that speaks of a long-sworn vengeance. According to the tale, the ushkans called a council of "wise ones" to discuss how the Vard might be defeated. Bas Celik attends this council and argues that the Vard cannot be defeated by force alone, and that the only hope is a pact with the Eternals of Winter that requires "a heavy sacrifice of blood." According to this tale, many side with the volodny but many refuse and it is called "the split council."

The tale continues, and implies that the volodny attempted to force the dissenting Ushka to join their ranks. The wise ones of the vale of Gnijezdo refuse the demands, and their people are ravaged by "terrible wolves with pinesap for blood and milk-blind eyes" - several scholars point to this as a reference to the plaguwulfs regularly connected with Bas Celik.

The people of the Vale of Gnijezdo, repulsed and horrified by the actions of the volodny, side with the Vard and vow vengeance against her. Similar stories are told in other vales, often framed in a way that suggests the volodny attempted to enslave their own people - the very people they claimed they were fighting to protect.

The Bargain

Early records say that the greatest of the Ushka sorcerers - who called themselves the "bargainers" - refused to bow their heads. When it became clear the Ushka were outmatched, these bargainers made terrible compacts with the Eternals of Winter. In return for dreadful sacrifices - and with the promise of more to come - these Volodny hid their hearts outside their bodies, becoming to all intents and purposes immortal. Kept alive by their hatred, and possessed of terrible hungers, they vowed collective vengeance against the Vard and those Ushka they now saw as collaborators.

Excerpt from "The History of Varushka"

During her discourse with Pakaanan, Bas Celik touches only briefly on her decision to join the volodny. Her refusal to speak of it is interesting in itself. Three key facts can be gathered from the various quotations from "Travels with Uncle Pannan".



Firstly, the volodny represented only a fraction of the bargainers. These magicians appear to have been the forerunners in many ways of the modern Varushkan cabalists; covens of scattered magicians involved in their own concerns who pursued disparate traditions of ritual magic. While they dealt regularly with the dark forces of Varushka, there is little in the early stories that reflects the “way of the volhov” - rather than trickery and cleverness they relied on oaths and binding agreements.

The majority of the remaining Ushka bargainers supported the decision to accept the Vard offer of peace. Bas Celik and her fellows apparently saw this as the greatest betrayal - their peers would rather bow to the Vard than keep fighting.

Second, it is clear that the forerunners of the volodny realised that without the support of their own people they could not defeat the Vard on a mortal time-scale. Bas Celik admits that this was the motivation that set her on the path to seek “immortality” - so that they could live long enough to liberate the Ushka from beneath the Vard boot. According to Ijena she spoke “matter of factly” about the decision, and considered it “sensible, logical and rational.”

Confronted by Pakaanan with the suggestion that the bargainers should have accepted the will of their people, Bas Celik became obstinate and threatened to end the discussion. Ijena speculated that “*Like many who secretly realise they have made the wrong decision, she refused to admit it to herself for even a second and struck out at anything that tried to force her to confront her error.*” Although, again, this is speculation on behalf of the narrator.

Third, the bargainers sought their immortality in the Wasteland. Fragments of *The Forsaken of Ushk* suggest that the proto-volodny knew that if they accepted the boon of any native Varushkan power they would tie themselves too closely to a force that could be overwhelmed in the future by the Vard. Worse, as their knowledge of oaths and bindings would have made clear, any power of the mortal world that could offer them the immortality they sought would use them as pawns in mortal power games and they needed to be in a position to pursue their own agenda (whether that was the destruction of the Vard, the liberation of the Ushk or the ascendancy of the Varushkan people).

In the end, they made a compact with an Eternal of Winter. *The Forsaken of Ushk* and several other sources assume that the Eternal in question was one of the Lady of the Grim Host³, the

³Kaela, *Queen of Silence*. Her concerns with death and the avoidance of the same would make her an obvious patron but there are very few recorded instances where she has offered any “gift of immortality” other than membership of her Grim Legion.



Tomb King⁴ or the Wendigo⁵. When questioned by Pakaanan, however, Bas Celik refuted these claims. This also matches up with a fragment of testimony from the trial of **Koshiev the White** – the alleged leader of the volodny executed during the fall of Alderei the Fair.

Rather they sought out an Eternal called “The Silent Witness”, an Eternal of Winter whose fascination is with oaths and bindings. Imperial records mention this entity only in passing, and question whether it is real or not. According to scattered fragments it is an Eternal that “witnesses” oaths in some fashion and seems to have a close tie to the hearth magics of Varushka. The Stargazer Mordis of Endsmeet, considered an expert on the Winter Eternals, speculated that “The Silent Witness” is entirely fictional – that references to it are fanciful or intentionally deceptive and that it is a metaphor for “the Eternals of Winter” as a whole.

The wise ones of Stag's Vale tell a story that Bas Celik was “the progenitor of the volodny” and that it was by her hand that the ritual to gain invulnerability was performed. There is no way to prove this, but given Bas Celik's interest in bargains and in binding eternal and sovereigns to the volodny cause it seems likely she was at least instrumental in developing the rite or securing the boon that allowed the volodny to assume their current state.

Regardless, Bas Celik claimed that to bind their oath they were required to make “a great sacrifice” although she would not admit to Pakaanan what it was. Surviving references to *The Forsaken of Ushk* strongly imply that each volodny achieved “immortality” at the cost of murdering (depending on the interpretation) three loved ones, three close friends, three family members or possibly three other bargainers. Several early sources agree that the volodny gained their power at a price that put them “beyond the pale of humanity.”

The rise of Alderei the Fair

In the time of the first Empress, the Volodny created a terrible champion, Alderei the Fair, who sought to conquer Varushka with the aid of their sorceries. In desperation, the Wise Ones convinced those Boyars who opposed Alderei to turn to the nascent Empire for help. Faced with few choices, many Boyars agreed to become part of the Empire, in return for aid against Alderei. With the strength of the Imperial forces, they were finally able to defeat the Volodny

⁴Sorin, the *Father of Draughir*. The immortality of the volodny could be seen as “the strength that comes from abandoning weakness”.

⁵Agramant. Many scholars claim Agramant is behind the volodny, but there is also a body of scholasticism that points out that some scholars believe Agramant is behind *everything* to do with Winter magic that threatens the Empire. A cogent argument is made in *Patterns of the Wendigo* by the Kallavesi mystic Regna of the Red Reeds that any group backed by the Wendigo tends to either implode or be destroyed in an orgy of violence within a century – the idea that it might be the patron of a conspiracy that has lasted so many centuries seems laughable.



pawn.

From "The History of Varushka"

During the rise of Alderei the Fair, Bas Celik was instrumental in securing agreements with sovereigns and other dark powers. In addition to securing the services of more Plagewulfs from the Howling Queen, she bragged to Pakaanan that she had "*bound the hunger of the Wendigo, tamed the treachery of Basilius Kade, and carried the nectar of Yaw'Nagrah to the table of the Boyar-King.*"

Wherever she accompanied Alderei's army she took great pleasure in binding defeated boyars, volhov and cabals to "*fatal promises*" - there is some evidence that in this she is referring to ritual curses similar to Traitor's Fate or Circle of Trust. By binding powerful individuals to these curses along with her own agents, she ensured they would obey their new Boyar - or they would pay the ultimate price.

According to several tales, she rarely bound powerful people directly - rather she bound their spouses, children and other loved ones. The price of disobedience was the painful death of a beloved friend or relative; few were prepared to pay that price. This exertion of power at a distance - of indirect influence - is a common element in stories involving Bas Celik.

In a moment of rare candor quoted in several places from the original *Travels with Uncle Panaan*, Bas Celik lays the blame for the collapse of Alderei's army at the feet of one of her peers. According to her, the volodny known by the sobriquet "**Kareina of the Swans**" or "**Silvertongue**" was supposed to bring the Urizen to support the volodny and failed. It was clear that Bas Celik despised Silvertongue for her failure - but also "let slip" (or intentionally revealed) that "Kareina of the Swans" was *not* Ushka. Speculation suggests that this volodny was Kallavesi, Navarr, Feni or Suaq by birth, an ally of the Ushka who made the same bargain⁶.

It is also interesting because Bas Celik's clear despise for Kareina of the Swans suggests that there are internal divisions within the volodny that may allow them to be manipulated.

When Alderei fell, Bas Celik claimed she was in Karsk attempting to gain the aid of the powerful sovereign that is associated with the Broken Barrow in Banoc. This sovereign - a powerful warchieftain of the Ushka who had achieved a form of immortality quite separate from that of the

⁶While Kareina of the Swans is best known for approaching the Urizen in the early days of the Empire, she also appears in several other lesser known histories attempting to gain allies for the Ushka among the other "forerunner" tribes - the Kallavesi, Suaq, Feni and other "scions of Terunael" as they are sometimes referred. This is interesting because it appears at odds with what many scholars believe to be the unified agenda of the volodny - the creation of an Ushkan empire - and strongly supports the idea that there are multiple competing goals at work within this conspiracy.



volodny – refused to help. It was while returning from her mission to gain assistance that Bas Celik learned of the volodny defeat and the death of Koshiev the White who she described as “*the first among us.*”

A quotation from “My Travels with Uncle Panaan” may be of interest here. It appears in only one place and cannot be confirmed without access to the original tome but it's implications are a little worrying.

My uncle chewed speculatively on the dark bread of the underworld for a few moments and said:

“If the first among you could be killed, does that not fill you with fear? I mean, if Koshiev the White was so potent, to see him executed by the Empire must have shaken your resolve.”

Bas Celik laughed bitterly then.

“Dead? I will believe Koshiev the White is dead only when time ends and he has not returned.”

Our hostess smiled at that, a cold knife-edge smile, but remained silent as Bas Celik continued.

“Do you really think that the man who made us what we are – that spent so many years in the swamps of the west studying the flight of birds – will let a little thing like death stop him? I know he will return from the bleak house and when he does he will bring with him the knowledge to finally cheat death without the need for hearts or bargains. Then your Empire will know fear like it has never known.”

She paused then, as if she felt she had said too much. The moment stretched and she said quietly:

“I do not think there is anything in creation that will keep Koshiev the White from his purpose. He will place his black crown on the head of an Ushkan Emperor, do not doubt it. To fail now would mean that all the terrible things he did were for nothing. I think he would tear the fabric of the world asunder rather than have so much horror be for nought.”

Fragment of “My Travels with Uncle Panaan” quoted in “Speculations on the Life of Koshiev the White”

Recent history

After the fall of Alderei, Bas Celik and the other volodny disappear from history for nearly a century. A version of her appears in several folk tales – she is usually seen offering a seemingly appealing bargain that ends in disaster for the foolish protagonist who accepts it. She is always accompanied by one or more wolves – actual canines – in these tales, and this is almost certainly a



reference to some ongoing agreement with the Howling Queen that means she is rarely seen without at least one plagewulf.

In the last 250 years she has been encountered several times during audiences with Eternals. She does not restrict herself to any one Realm, and has been reported in negotiations with Basilius Kade, Sadogua, Kaela and Sorin. She has also been mentioned more than once as dealing with the Thule – while she clearly hates and despises the orcs, and they in turn must likewise hate and despise her, neither side seems loathe to use the other as tools. It is inevitable that one side will betray the other, and it would be in the interests of the Empire to ensure such betrayal takes place sooner rather than later.

Like most volodny, she prefers to work through agents and whenever she is encountered she is known to gather a cabal of magicians around herself to serve as her coven. She accepts only “pure blooded Ushka” – those who bear the white mark of strong Ushkan blood. The oath taken by her covens always involves loyalty to Bas Celik and her goals and there is some evidence that she reinforces this oath using the Circle of Trust to ensure mutual loyalty among her cabalists.

Whenever she appears, she is seeking to increase the power of the volodny cause by gaining allies – what appear to be her own goals and agendas are often those of other beings. Her own aim is usually to acquire something that will allow her to influence or gain the support of another being. This is another reason she is often referred to in texts by the sobriquet “Binder.”

She is known to have a great store of sovereign lore – their weaknesses, strengths and details of their limitations – which she uses to bargain with them. In the past she has demonstrated that she is prepared to use that lore to harm those weaker sovereigns who refuse her demands. As a consequence, many of the sovereigns of Varushka – the creatures tied to the land itself and bound by certain bands – despise her and she is rarely welcome among them.

Several volhov have pointed to this as a weakness – but directly opposing the sovereigns who will not bend to her will, she makes it that much harder for any volodny to gain their co-operation at a later date. On more than one occasion there are reports of unlooked-for aid coming to a Warden brotherhood or peripatetic volhov trapped in the intrigues of the volodny, apparently sent by a sovereign that has suffered a setback at the hands of Bas Celik.

Another common thread, and this cannot be stressed enough, is that Bas Celik regularly lies to mortals she encounters. Pakaan mentioned in a letter to an Urizen friend that “*After my dinner with the Binder, I felt that either nothing she had told me was true or that everything was but that she assumed I would assume it was all lies. She is clever – and perhaps just a little bit overly impressed with that cleverness as such creatures are so easily prone to being.*”



“On Oaths and Bindings” (a valuable book of lore about creating magical oaths and bindings) references *The Forsaken of Ushk* and warns that when dealing with volodny one should only believe “a promise or oath that involves the creature swearing by or on their name or their heart”.

According to many volhov, this binding is generally potent anyway – but it is the only way to be sure that a volodny believes it is telling you the truth.

The Heart of Bas Celik and her Immortality

Like all the volodny, Bas Celik is functionally immortal. She does not age, and while her body can be cut down relatively easily, she will not remain dead. Like many such creatures, her body rapidly decays to nothing after it is killed. Then, a short time later, she returns to “life” in the vicinity of her heart.

Calling the “heart” of a volodny a “heart” is a metaphor – it refers to an article imbued with the life-force of the volodny, an anchor that prevents their spirit from entering the Labyrinth and that allow them to form a new corpus. *Anchors of the Soul* - a speculative text penned in 204YE by the cabalist Marishka of Void – claimed that bodies could not be created from nothing and instead theorized that the volodny “inhabit” corpses much as the winter spirits invoked by Quickening Cold Meat are inhabited. The magic of the heart twists the corpse to appear as the volodny did in life, but that the spirit must sometimes range far afield to find a suitable body into which it can incarnate.

In addition to the body, each volodny is known to possess one or more artifacts that make the transition with them – that are “part of their soul” according to *The Forsaken of Ushk*. These articles are bound indelibly to the volodny, and when he or she is forced to abandon a body the item turns to dust and ashes and reforms along with the new incarnation.

Bas Celik is known to bear a distinctive staff that bears the powers of a Staff of the Law – the ability to restrict or enforce movement in those she strikes with it. Pakaanan is quoted by his niece as saying “*Apart from being an artifact, it was nothing special. Just a Staff of the Law. But what a lot it revealed out Bas Celik, eh? That the one thing she would not be apart from was a staff that allowed her to command others.*”

According to *Forsaken of Ushk*, each volodny has a different heart and cannot be permanently slain without destroying the heart. Unfortunately, different scholars do not agree on how or when the heart should be destroyed. All agree that Words of Ending is the most effective way to unmake a volodny heart – and it was this ritual used during the trial of the volodny after the defeat of Aderei the Fair.

Some scholars say the heart must be destroyed first, rendering the volodny mortal, and then the



creature killed. Others say that this may allow the volodny time to create a new heart – although there is absolutely no proof that this is possible one way or another.

Other scholars say that the volodny must first be killed, and then the heart destroyed while the volodny is still in “spirit form” – trapping them forever “between worlds”. Unable to enter the labyrinth but unable to incarnate themselves again, the volodny is eternally exiled from creation.

The largest group claim that the best way to destroy the heart is in the presence of the volodny and that the two should be destroyed at the same time. This is how the volodny captured after the Alderei the Fair incident were executed.

Several tales caution against the dangers of destroying the wrong heart – the Urizen and Varushkan magicians who studied the hearts claimed at the fall of Alderei said that they were irrevocably bound to the volodny who created them, and that Reading the Weave should always be employed to ensure the heart is bound to the volodny one is about to execute.

This danger is illustrated by the tale of “*The foolish vodyanor*” in which a greedy merrow gets hold of the heart of a volodny and uses it to threaten and cajole one of the bargainers to perform increasingly humiliating deeds. In the end, the volodny refuses and the merrow triumphantly “breaks” the heart ... only to discover that it is the heart of a *different* volodny who rains devastation down on the merrow and his vale in retaliation.

Of course the first obstacle that must be overcome is locating the heart in the first place. Each is well hidden and protected by wards. There seems to be no common thread beyond the fact the hearts are hidden. Some volodny use Night magic to conceal their hearts, while others avoid all magic in the belief that the presence of the magic itself will draw curious eyes. Some have allegedly entrusted their hearts to the inhabitants of regio, or to Eternals – there is a story that **Shadowsmith** has gifted his heart to an Eternal in return for a magical tool that allows this volodny to create enchanted items with unparalleled skill.

Bas Celik herself claimed that her heart was “*in a tree; quite a valuable tree – to me at least*” but would not be drawn further. She told Pakaanan this “*in mocking tones, as if she knew the information would be of no use, or as if she was taunting him. My uncle rubbed his chin and said ‘Well, there are a lot of trees in Varushka’ and Bas Celik laughed.*”

This account of Pakaanan agrees with the story of the wise ones of Stag’s Vale, who claim that Bas Celik “*tore out her own heart and locked it away inside a tree.*”

The hearts can be found – after all, several volodny met their ends after the defeat of Alderei, and in the centuries before and after – but in each case the heart has been located through



cleverness and trickery rather than reliance on magical rituals. In the words of Callus Strategos⁷ “People keep asking us to design a ritual to find the volodny hearts. It is as if they have never made any study of magic at all! What is a volodny heart? What makes it unique? Can I perform a ritual to find every *Biting Blade* in the Empire? Might as well ask us to create a ritual to find a specific grain of sand on a beach. Bring me some volodnies, and we might be able to trace their bonds but wishing for a ritual to find a specific item based on it's name ... wishing is nice. But hardly effective. If it was that easy, one of the diviner idiots in the last few centuries would probably have already done it. After all, I'm sure volodny hearts would fetch a good price on the Bourse.”

Limitations of the volodny

Excerpts from *The Forsaken of Ushk* and *anchors of the Soul* both seem to agree that the immortality of the volodny is “draining” and it cannot be denied that their existence seems to be marked by long periods of inactivity. Following incidents where a volodny is “slain” there is generally a gap of at least a few months before the volodny is seen or heard from again – indeed, it is speculated that this period of inactivity coincidentally allowed the surviving volodny to avoid the fate of those captured during the fall of Alderei.

Travels with Uncle Panaan suggests a second weakness. He points out to his niece that Bas Celik wields a staff whose sole purpose is to allow her to perform incantations that either Pakaanan or the narrator could learn to cast with a little application and time. He speculates that either the volodny *cannot* learn new magical lore, either as a restriction of their immortal form or as part of their bargain with their benefactor – or that the volodny “forget” any new lore they have mastered when they take on a new incarnation. Either restriction suggests sobering limits – otherwise, a magician with literally centuries of time to learn new realm lores and to master incantations and rituals would be of unimaginable power.

In *anchors of the Soul* Marishka of Void speculates that the volodny maintain a “*continuity of identity*” between one incarnation and the next, and that while they might not be able to recall new magical lore they lose no other memories. She speculated that this could be proved by performing a testimony on a volodny and then seeing if the creature still maintained that testimony when it was encountered in the future. If the testimony did in fact endure then it might point to other tools that could be used to harm or even destroy the volodny. Sadly, there is no surviving record of whether this experiment has ever been performed.

Finally, several sources point out that the volodny do not seem capable of simply dying – they cannot just choose to be no longer alive. They can kill themselves, as is demonstrated by several cases, but they can also be held prisoner. Muddled accounts from the first century YE speak of a volodny artisan help prisoner in Temeschwar and forced to create weapons and armour for a

⁷Dean of the Lyceum for much of the reign of Empress Brannan



certain carta. The dramatic presentation of “*The Prince and the Shadowsmith*” is rarely performed, but it points out several times that the volodny “*never ate a crumb nor drank a drop of wine*” suggesting that the creatures do not need sustenance as living creatures do.

Obviously, the Temeschvari prince meets a bad end in the play. His skull and bones are taken by **Shadowsmith** and used to make magical items for a conspiracy of volodny-affiliates within Temeschwar who try to plunge the entire region into chaos.

There are few historical details still extant⁸ that suggest this is anything other than a fabrication, but scholars of the volodny believe there is some truth in it. The volodny are powerful, and hard to kill, but they are closer to being humans than to being all-powerful titans of magical might.

Signed by:..... Yannick Svarkikov.....

Date: Spring Equinox, 378 YE.....

⁸Although there is a great deal of speculation that some of the criminals purged from Temeschwar – the forerunners of the vyig carta – were saved from the winter blizzards by a volodny. Whether this actually happened, and whether it was at the hands of Shadowsmith or Bas Celik or a third, unnamed volodny, is impossible to say.