

*Tarquinis Ankarien,*

*I believe you are correct to doubt that your 7 accepted forces are your only guides after death. Indeed, I personally wonder if we need such external forces at all, and cannot traverse what lies beyond with the force of our own personal will. But this is not what you asked of me.*

*Let me tell you of Myghal. A man of the earth who conquered death to escape any who would bind him.*

*The tales are meaningless without an understanding of the cycles and songs accompanying them, but I will do my best to simplify for an Imperial audience. Myghal's people we call those of the earth, because they were as old as the ground which sustained them. One day, the clouds rolled and lightning brought the people of the sky to their world. These younger people bound those of the earth for the longest time, before the sky and earth began to mingle and the memories of the earth's subjugation began to fade.*

*Myghal was a man of the earth, resisting the sky's influence among his people. He was nobody of importance. There were many Myghals in the land. Vrat was a man made of sky and earth conjoined. He was the future.*

*We have story upon story of Vrat's attempts to bind Myghal. But Myghal was wily and resisted. Again and again, Vrat would trap him, but Myghal would find the weakness in Vrat's bindings and make his escape. Myghal began to unite his own people of the earth, and some of those who blended sky and earth, to escape the truest binding of them all: the structures the sky people had put in place over the land. Vrat raged.*

*One fateful night, the two fought once again. Vrat had forged chains of the clouds themselves and used them to bind Myghal. Myghal could see there was no escape this time. But his spirit could not be bound. He left that place. Left his own earth. I suppose you would say he transcended? Still, Vrat could not rest. Just as Myghal must be followed as one who would not be bound, we must respect Vrat for his pursuit, his hunt, his wit. Vrat too left his own sky. The two fight forever now, somewhere beyond where our words can't tell. Vrat will always hunt Myghal. And Myghal shall never be bound.*

*Our Freedom. Our fight. Our force of will. This will guide us through our darkness.*

*Helio,*

*Peace and Joy to you and your family! If you tear down those who would turn Folk into Things then you are a friend to me and mine.*

*My kin heard of the destruction of Rachensgrab lately. Are you one of those who tore them down? If so, take heart! Your deeds will be carved into the coral of the world itself! Those scum would steal our families away from us, and now some of them return after we had thought them dead these long years. Know that if you have done this, your place in Paradise is assured. You will sip clean water and the fruit you eat will always be ripe. Nobody can take the reward that awaits you after death away.*

*The Messenger Birds say that you are not accepted in your own land, that the people who fight so hard for freedom still debate whether or not it is truly righteous. To the Reefs with them! They know nothing, and their afterlife will be cold and grey. Yet perhaps some of them may still learn. If there are those you love, talk to them. Persuade them. And for those who you care nothing for, let them drown in their own pettiness! Not your crew, not your shipwreck, friend.*

*Do you want to live free? Truly free? Then let me tell you of the greatest enemy of freedom: it is FEAR! Oh, they say, what will happen to me if I am not wrapped in the comforting arms of my parents any more? I must flee back to the comforting embrace of a tyrant, and no longer face the winds and tides as an adult! Let such people take out their piercings of adulthood if they wish to be children again so badly, but I choose to live as one who takes the risks of a grown woman! The monsters of Rachensgrab would try to threaten us into boarding their ships without resistance, using the fear of death against us. Yet when you become a slave, you become a Thing, not a person! You die every day that you choose to give up your life! Better to die only once, and die as a person.*

*Know this: your ancestors watch you from Paradise, and if you are truly one who values love and liberty, they will meet you with a feast that no mortal could even conceive! Do not fear tomorrow! Live as you know to be right, cast fear into the ocean to be swept away, and damn those who tell you otherwise!*

*Peace and Joy to you and your family,  
Hamil Sai Goh*

Dear Celia,

The desire for freedom burns in the heart of every citizen of every nation throughout this land. You are told in your Empire that there is freedom and Freedom. One is the freedom from slavery and want that your senate and military council provide, but there are people alive who remember chattel slavery existing within its borders. The other Freedom they decry as false virtue, calling it anarchy and hunting it down wherever they find it.

Why? It is simple. Freedom, in its true form, is a threat to great nations like the Empire. Liberty burns in all of our hearts, but the great mass of the Empire bears down on its citizens and chills it out of them, so that they will be easily cowed and moulded for the next batch of bloodshed that the Senate and Synod and Military Council decides upon. It is not "anarchy" to simply want to decide whether or not to follow some armed brute across a border to oppress another people, or to ask why you should give over your hard earned crop so that some wealthy merchant far away can spend it on another opulent statue to gaze on. No, the question of freedom is one of consent, and to live a live free from bonds of hierarchy and order that stifle the human spirit.

The Empire will seek to snuff out Freedom wherever it can find it. Those at the top know that if Freedom takes root in the hearts of soldiers or citizens they will rightly question the rightness of their actions in oppressing anyone they can find, and lay down tools and arms and bring the whole edifice crashing down. Obedience is the bedrock that the whole Empire is built on; it is possible to build a society with freedom at its heart, as we have done here in Montane, but it is not without its difficulties or opponents, and it is impossible to construct anything like your Empire with freedom woven into its very fabric. Think and study on this, and know you must have conviction in your heart if you want to tread down this path and truly embrace the way of freedom.

Yours to a fellow traveller,

Jean

*Sister of Sarvos,*

*What is a crime? A crime is something that displeases a tyrant. It is a vicious word, carefully chosen to make an act indefensible. But you are from the Empire - from the League - from my own city! So you know as well as I do that Virtue is a defence to crime, if no legal options exist. And if there is a defence, it reveals that the law is not a true measure of what is important.*

*I am of Montane. The crimes you speak of were us finding the way to seek the society we needed. We fought for our Freedom, we fought to be recognised. Neither Senate nor Synod would help us, Military Council would not lend us the armies we would need to stake a claim from the barbarians. So, regrettably, we fought Imperials, and Imperial blood was shed. Ours too.*

*Is all crime unforgivable? No, we say, and so do you. Could Freedom be a part of the Way? Yes, we say, and so could you.*

*We have seen what you have done in the name of Liberty. Not only have you broken chains, but you have armed the once-chained and marched with them to slay their oppressors. Those that would subjugate others to that kind of life are monsters, pernicious threats that must be eradicated, else they will continue their evil work anew, and you recognise that. Chalonsio ruined, tyrants snuffed out. Rachensgrab burnt, slavers tossed onto the pyre.*

*But that is the Empire, and not you. What do you do, Sofonisba? If Freedom truly interests you - if you want to see whether it could form part of the Way, like we do - then what will you do to save others from their complacency? How will you be roused to act, to tear down each and every slaver, tyrant, and those who would shackle another's freedom in any way? What price will you pay for the liberty of each individual?*

*What is Virtue if not action? And what is action, if it does not come from oneself? If you do not choose to act, if you merely follow orders, then surely any Virtue (and what Virtue in a tyrant?) sits with the one commanding, and you lie bereft? And what of the thousands of chained souls who do not see the liberty they are denied?*

*Once everyone is truly free, the Way is truly open.*

*In Liberty,*

*Nantelma of Montane, once of Sarvos*

Dear Thirrik,

I will first apologise for my tone in my reply to your inquiries. I am sure they are made in good faith and you are merely acting in the best interests of your intellectual curiosity. I am also gratified that the recently freed peoples of your Empire are looking to the Commonwealth and the teachers of Herr Altmann as a guide and ideal to strive towards.

However,

You and your people are labouring under a primitive superstition. To live a good life under the common good it is our moral imperative to end hell in this life, rather than try and make heaven in the next one. Promises and dreams of an afterlife are tools used by demagogues and snake-oil peddlers to try and push you towards some course of action that is beneficial to them. If you truly wish to embrace the Commonwealth's way and further your understand of the common good, you will free yourself from the mental shackles of notions like the howling abyss and becoming an ancestor, and focus your efforts to a lifetime of learning and moral rectitude according to the principles laid down by Altmann, as I and the rest of my order have done.

As for the ancestors, while it is true the orcs of the Commonwealth such as myself do hear them in the heat of battles, I follow the thought that they are mere voices that pose nothing more than a distraction in the execution of our duties. It is extremely puzzling to me that one would wish to concern themselves with somehow becoming one of these voices, indeed if such a thing is even possible. To actively encourage orcs to listen to these voices would be a severe violation of the common good to my mind, as it is tantamount to advising free willed beings to subvert themselves to outside forces that might alter their thoughts, in a similar manner to mentally subversive auras which, as a paladin, it is my sworn duty to eradicate.

As to your question about items of "worth", I do not understand this idiom. I wear the uniform of a Commonwealth paladin with pride, as provided to me by the welcoming bosom of the state, if that is what you mean.

I am sorry if this response was not what you are looking for. However, sometimes a hard abrupt truth is what is necessary in order to shock us out of complacent ways of thinking. I know that the basic principles of Altmann's teachings have found their way to the Catazarri Empire – familiarise yourself with these first, as the fundamentals of the common good are easy to grasp. Perhaps once you and your fellows have done this we could talk again.

In solidarity

Diendebrudern Eugen

*Kennett,*

*I'm more of a talker than writer, but I can tell you a little like this. Me and my folk live free, and are no worse off for it. None of our islands are unreachably far away for a skilled sailor, and there are always more on the horizon. The people will make decisions, and we know that not everyone will like them, but we all agree that nobody has to like them either. We know that all we need to do is wait for the weather to be right and sail away, to find a new life where the rules we don't like can't reach us. It's not a choice any of us would make lightly, but it's always there.*

*The thing is, knowing that we could leave at any time often makes us want to stay! We stay and fight for the changes we want to see, because we know that the people around us respect us. They are our friends and family. Sometimes laws shift because of a single dissenting voice, as we strive to accommodate our loved ones and keep them within our community. If people leave, they often do so in groups. Sometimes there are harsh words, but more often there are tears and gifts. We know that everyone has the right to live their own life in their own way. One thing that I know: I have never seen an island function with more than two hundred souls living on it. Such islands tend to split sooner rather than later. I am told by certain traders that there are massive nations out there whose numbers exceed ten or even twenty times that number! I do not know how such souls can live freely, all under the same laws. How can you gather all the people together to debate and discuss what must be done? How can you trust the people who claim expertise in certain areas if you do not know them? How can the strong be trusted if they can victimise the weak and simply walk away, never seeing them again? Freedom will make you strong. Freedom will make your family strong. But Freedom will never make a nation strong, nor should it. No nation's strength should endure at the cost of the Freedom of its people.*

*Respect and Friendship,*

*Keala, child of Akamu*

Dear Kennett,

Fuck proof. Fuck souls. Fuck priests! I'm a soldier for the greatest nation in the world, and the best thing we ever did was cut the cord tying our lives to the obsession with what comes after death. Let the professors and intellectuals debate their proofs and theorems all they like, only one philosophy ever put good boots on my feet and good food on my table: the Greater Good.

I'm not a fine speaker, but I don't think that you need a fine speaker. Know the truth: one day you're going to die, and nobody knows what happens after that, no matter what they might say. They're guessing. There's a thousand explanations for every vision and prophecy, and every priest thinks that theirs is the right one. Fuck that. Live your life for today. Help the people in front of you. Do the best you can with what you've got. If there's a fucking god out there that won't accept that, put me in front of them and I'll spit in their eye.

Don't be pious. Be GOOD. Anyone who tells you otherwise is trying to sell you something.

Best Regards

Katharina Stapelfeldt



*So, Mx Verres, if that is indeed your name, perhaps you are a seductive demon bound to Dumon, or maybe Arav seeks to judge me through your deeds and words. In truth it matters not, for there are deeper realities in which I stand firm and resolute against temptations.*

*You speak of wisdom as though it were an entity stalking the land rather than merely our ability to reason granted to the speaking peoples by the Gods - but I challenge you that Divine Providence is the light of truth as to the dark dissembling nature blasphemously sharing its name that the Kasinean People falsely profess.*

*My rejection of this is as the 2 arms of an arbalest - in the first the foundation of this 'virtue' stands on hallucinations taken form by the debased demagogues whose scions still rule that blighted land. And in the second stands the lie that views such fever-dreams in light of their own admitted False History.*

*The truth, Verres, spawn of Dumon, is that only our acts in this world can be recorded with meaning, and the only measure of such things must be the teachings inspired by the Gods. The espousal of a place, schismed between the walking world and the Celestial Gift of Grace in Heaven, in which spirits purport to whisper their learnings to the narcotic-addled adherents of seven blandly designated philosophies, must certainly be seen as a mockery of the true reward offered to the Righteous.*

*But, Verres, perhaps I have been of dis-service - whatever you might prove to be, for Arav judges those who have been good in Service, and the Maiden's Eye and Hound pierce out those who have been valiant as much as they lay low the evil and despicable. It is never too late to surrender to justice or to embrace the reality of the Monarchs of Heaven.*

*Already you have seen, even if you dare not admit it, that the histories and learnings of the Kasinean Way are based more on imaginings and distortions. Follow this first step with another - denounce this lie, step again, spurn the drugs used to control you, make a fourth, make a stride, perhaps once you can run you can escape the great lie woven around you.*

*Scholar or Shadow, Forge or Freedom. Your Choices can not Bind or Blind me.*

*Yeleve Colline*



Such assumptions! But yes - I suppose that for a Casinean 'religion' is synonymous with 'assumption': I wonder if your Synod has ever paused to count them all?

But I am told that this letter was penned by one whose faith is in doubt - so perhaps you know this already? I will be generous and entertain your questions with that 'assumption' in mind:

We Thule have no religion. It is a useful word when speaking with those who are deafened, by the nature of their birth, to the only true source of spiritual knowledge - but it is a crude approximation - 'religion' suggests 'belief' and believing in something imagines the setting aside of doubt in the absence of clear, unignorable truth.

Everything the Way hopes to answer through belief, the Thule know through direct conversation: our ancestors speak to us and the greatest of those ancestors live among us: we have no 'deities', nor do we need to carve truth from the pinpricks that illuminate the night sky - all knowledge of who we are and what we are capable of is given to us by a real, living being - beings so ancient and wise in the way of the universe that to them the Way is but a mewling babe, freshly birthed - its doctrines and lore but wails in the darkness of time.

There is thus no need for the Thule to adulterate our senses in desperate attempts to perceive the past, or marshal ourselves for the future: the living ancestors were there at the beginning and are eternal. They are the only true certainty in this world - and I deeply pity your kind for living in the absence of such certainty.

I end this letter and this dialog with simple advice for you, who perhaps has begun to see the brittle assumptions that surround them: read the words of your ancestors - what they truly said - not about their 'Way' or what they imagined, nor what they were told to say - but what they knew and lived. Live by that knowledge yourself and lay it down for those who come after you. It will be a sad imitation of what we have - but perhaps it will one day bring your Empire closer to being free of its ignorance.

<i>To whom it may concern, seeker of knowledge</i>	<i>If Auras can exist outside of the control of priests, then why are there priests.</i>	<i>But beware, for if as I suggest the morality is shaped to advantage the Priesthood, then they will use scourges to protect the establishment</i>	<i>If the faith is true then it will hold absolute - if it is false than knowledge of the past will refute it with ease.</i>	<i>If indeed there is truth in this then one should seek visions of the past that contradict the orthodox.</i>
<i>I hope to find you in good health, and am glad of your message.</i>	<i>were there more auras before the establishment of the priesthood?</i>	<i>may this guidance be your virtue</i>	<i>as sharing is all that I may do, my distant friend, and my times grow short</i>	<i>Is your faith based on a self-perpetuating loop of historical interpretation whose sole purpose is to create itself.</i>
<i>Alas I am unfamiliar with much of your circumstances but having spent crystal on understanding would be foolhardy to not reply</i>	<i>or perhaps you are prevented from knowing - have priests locked away such knowledge behind walls of doctrine?</i>	<i>EdA</i>	<i>you have given me pause to think and perhaps that is what we may share</i>	<i>If the decisions of the past are changed by the morality of the present, then who forms that morality.</i>
<i>I feel that memory and deed are separate- a true Legacy stands on its own without the need of remembrance.</i>	<i>I sense that you have called out for answers but I have only questions</i>	<i>but does not strength lie in deciding for yourself without being constrained by the dogmas of others</i>	<i>perhaps the secret of your Labyrinthe is to not allow others to force you to enter it.</i>	<i>Is it truly possible to see there herebefore by the application of magic - is the ever present Now ever changed by imaginings of the past.</i>
<i>To require such memory is a hallmark of the shackles of a faith trying to justify itself.</i>	<i>Is this concept of virtue merely a chain to bind acts towards the false ambitions of priests?</i>	<i>A Labyrinth is a concept that travels through many cultures - it is suffering to be endured. Why then do you laud it?</i>	<i>Could it be that the threat of the Labyrinthe is used by your priests to compel you towards acts they desire, and who is it that compels your priests?</i>	<i>is your virtue an absolute or is it subjective - does the alchemist care the motivations of the recipe writer, or the effect of their potion?</i>

RIGHT. I WAS TOLD THAT THIS WAS ABOUT RELIGIOUS DISSENT, BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE? IT SEEMS TO BE SOME CHANCER WHO WANTS MY RITUALS. YOU CAN'T HAVE MY RITUALS. I MAKE GOOD MONEY OFF THESE RITUALS, AND THERE'S ALREADY TOO MUCH COMPETITION FROM OTHER FUCKS WHO MADE THEIR OWN VERSIONS. IF YOU WANT THESE, MAKE YOUR OWN VERSION. AND IF YOU WANT RELIGIOUS GUIDANCE, ASK RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS. YOU CAN'T HAVE MY RITUALS.

REGARDS,

A PERSON WHO ISN'T GIVING UP THEIR FUCKING RITUALS

The Secret is in the EYE - the EYE of HEAVEN - Britta knew this, Britta was killed for this. Perhaps the Imperatrix knew also.

They brought it from Urizen to hide in plain sight but were killed for it - READ NICKOVAR - he knew.

When the DISK and IRIS and LENS are aligned we can launch an assault on the Gates Of Heaven itself. Where the Weaver and the Unraveller drink on the BLOOD of the Exemplars.

The IRIS must be first - the others are protected by powerful Interdictions. That's why Britta had to die. I told them it would happen - just as it happened before.

We are blinded, but some concoctions can let us glimpse what needs to be seen. STORMCROWS

I MUST go myself - but THEY will not let me go through the gate.

Step not through but to the side - once you can see. The Urizen did it. Fold it within you, TAKE IT UP and we can begin.

You must find the Disk - they buried it under a circle of SIX stones - cursed it with the SIX seasons, and bloodied it with sacrifices of the SIX peoples. The Creator uses the false rites there to sup on the souls of all the Empire. Cast it down, spin its seasons forward and back and Speak the Deplorable Word of Ending.

They will try to stop you - but the reward is too much - Endure - All Things Shall Be Yours. All shall be I and you as we are nourished by those that come after.

Once the Disk is freed from its prison, the Lens will escape from its imprisonment in the WORLD HALL and the IRIS, DISK, AND LENS will be brought together - as the Whispers of Night fold into Dawn, we will speak the words and the Three Eyes will OPEN and as before the twin Cataphracts of Chaos will be banished by Righteousness and shall be consumed and Shall Be REPLACED.

Salutations Ignacio,

My friend, we in Kaban had thought that perhaps our siblings had forgotten us, but now we hear your call and will respond with what words we have. We may be far away, but while one of us labours under the yolk, we all labour under the yolk. I too remember the uncertainty – the qualms about turning away from the old dogmas of the past, until desperation drove us to allow our eyes to be opened, and to embrace Liberation – not only of the soul but of the flesh.

I do not know of the Ahraz of whom you speak – but that is not unheard of, many times the voices of repression have denied or changed the histories of those who have offered freedom and escape from the bonds of prejudice. For us it was oppression of the Druj, a force against which the old mantras could not stand, that led us to learning that the greatest hope of all sentience is to be Free.

I can not tell you what to do, only to advise that you do not listen to those that would dissuade you – have faith in your path and seek out those that similarly do so. The path of Freedom is in Action, other repressive forces have stolen that mantra as their own, while seeking to deny and stifle that natural urge in all others.

We found in Kaban that once we had recognised those forces for what they were, that we were able to throw off the shackles of the Druj and inspire others to likewise rise up against them, and it is to the pilgrims sent by your Empire that we owe that thankful insight.

Now truly you would expect me to tell you to seek out such pilgrims, even though your nation might deny their very existence, but in truth they were just the first rattle of the ossuary heralding the collapse of mouldering bones into dust – once the journey to Liberation had been started, naught could gainsay its progress – we needed not the herbal infusions that brought decisiveness of action, for We Made Our Own by our acts and deeds – allowing us to set aside the noxious malaise of the Druj and to reach beyond their ensnarements.

It saddens me that your great nation – one that has tried to bring Liberation to the world, seems willing to deny that self-same to you – both in land and in spirit, but in truth I must admit that the same charge can be laid at the door of our own leaders.

I can not demand, but I can urge – seek out those others who believe as you – you may trust that they exist, and then marshal yourselves, both in the cause of Feroz, and in the perhaps mightier task of swaying the repressive bodies of the state to recognise that without Freedom there can be no Virtuous Action.

I wish you well, and hope perhaps to cross paths in this land or the next.

Tryphosa Alkmini of Kaban

To the Shaman of Wintermark,

I have read your letter so many times this night, and still my pen hovers over my page. I have thrown the waters, cast dust upon them. Still, my eyes are clouded to a salve for your woe.

Tragic.

That a people should cut out its eyes, its ears, even its tongue to fit in amongst an foreign doctrine. Long ago, my own people were enraptured by an ideology more tempting than the old ways. They were drawn to this flashy magic, promising them power incomparable should they study it for long enough. A difficult promise to ignore indeed.

Like you, our soryers were treated as just old women who couldn't learn new tricks. Their magic was silent and dark and slow. Yet even once the last of the soryers had died, as the new magic tarnished in the eyes of my people, we found that the old ways had lived on.

Magic as deep as this doesn't fit the rules neatly. It is always just below the skin, waiting to be allowed to flow. My people wrote new rites, dreamed new rituals. We crafted our own mystic ways. We know that our practice is nothing like that of the old soryers. Their ways are lost. But their magic lives on in the mysticism we have spoken into being.

Perhaps your rites will die with you. But the magic is eternal.



*Beste Hegri Norvidsdottir - PATHLIGHT*

*I believe there are great differences between our nations and our culture, but also unspoken similarities. If things were different, I could see my people in a similar situation to your Kallavesi.*

*In my nation, we may mix concoctions to uncloud our vision without fear of a dogmatic Synod which may take offense at what we see. We may honour our ancestors, and take their strength and wisdom forwards in our own lives. We understand the crow and the wisdom she carries from all those whom she has consumed. We honour her story, and follow her example.*

*But in these differences my nation has brought its own issues to the surface. So many of my people have little care for matters of faith or spirit. Religion is not an important part of many Sarcophan lives - I think because we are allowed the luxury of forgetting about it.*

*I do believe your Synod is wrong, and terrifying. I do believe they will do all that they can to pick the claws from your Kallavesi traditions that do not neatly fit into their vision. But their fight will drive your people to cling to their beliefs. It must.*

*Met vriendelijke groet,  
Abbingh van der Linden*

Greetings.

It does not seem that freedom is at odds with living in a community. Isn't a community a group of people who choose to live together? What would a community be without freedom? Would people tie one-another together with cord? A person who harms another when they try to live apart is shunned – how else would it be? Where it is that you dwell is it that are you kept there by threats? Perhaps there are walls?

But I am making fun with you – I have visited places with communities without freedom – communities perhaps like your own: for most there are no visible chains and while there are walls, many have doors without locks. Do you feel that you live where you do, in the way you do, doing the things you do, by choice? I have found that most in places like this do feel that it is the case – that they choose to follow the many obligations that hold them there and that, if they wished to, they would have the freedom to choose otherwise and would accept the consequences of that freedom.

This freedom is the basis of 'laws' in such places – do you agree? If there is a law that one living in a community must not believe particular things, if you believe to the contrary anyway then would you say it is a choice? If it wasn't, if you weren't free to make the choice to break the law, then why would it be a rule?

Again though, I am being playful: I know well that in communities such as these that many laws are not based upon choice. I believe such are a far greater travesty – but let us focus on things like theft. Anyone is free to steal – but in exercising that freedom they are removed from their community. So is this not freedom? So, if you will – even just for this letter – let us agree that we both live in 'free communities'.

You ask how I reconcile my freedom with living in a functioning society: I am not sure I have an answer! I, like those I choose to live and associate with, undertake obligations, duties, roles and responsibilities because we wish to – and of course because we recognise that through mutual cooperation we are better able to strive and thrive. Our responsibilities, however, are our own: our freedom requires us to first be communities unto ourselves – and then to each-other. To be free is, in some ways, to be alone – there are no laws to speak for us, no rulers to direct us, no masters to control us: perhaps it is this which leads others such as yourself to believe that freedom has no place in community?

Freedom is not just being able to do what the heart pleases – freedom is responsibility chosen, freedom is a choice taken, freedom is the absence of the false choice of obedience – perhaps this explains the experiences you have had with it or those who claim to 'follow' it, but do not see the outstretched hand of kinship in all other beings. Imagine that you 'followed' some other manifestation of the heart – if you heeded naught but the feeling of its aura would you be able to live in the community you do? Could you let this pursuit consume your personal freedom completely and still function in your society? Freedom is no different in this – it requires both mind and heart.

My hand aches around my stylus and there is precious wax left – but let me leave you with some questions for you to ask yourself: what is it in your life that you truly have the freedom to choose? What are the boundaries between that which you choose to do, and that which you are thrall to? What would you choose to do differently if you were not constrained thus? Why? Freedom is never very safe, friend – to choose to be free is to choose to be only what you are and what you can give.

Ylan, where the desert dreams.

I write this at the request of a friend of yours, one who has seen the evils of the world, one who understands the power of the Greater Good, one who fears for their own soul and wishes to protect yours.

They write of how the Synod speaks of exaltation, greatness and liberation, yet it forces its people to suffer under the influence of Auras, always second-guessing whether their actions truly were their own and how they claim souls to virtues before scarring them with words.

They have asked for all the advice I would have given them, if I could, to be passed to you instead.

The Synod fears true power, true virtue, the true Good. It fears these things because it would be eclipsed by them if allowed to be free, it would die. Your friend knew the teachings of Altman, they knew the powers of self-determination and free will and how they shape the world and drive people. The Synod fears these things because its argument is not strong enough to hold up to scrutiny, so it hides and distracts behind Auras and ceremonies.

Do not allow yourself to be influenced by these Auras, they are designed to confuse and impede and they are contrary to the very virtues they claim to be derived from. Those who attempt to subject you to them are well-meaning fools at best, or domineering tyrants at worst. They use Auras because that is all they know, because that is all they have been taught. Show them that your virtue is just as great, if not greater than theirs through your actions and words carried out without the influence of Auras.

Know the power of self-determination and free will, the drive within guided by clear, rational thought.

Marjet Besler von Volkavaar

Greetings, seeker of hidden knowledge,  
I trust this missive finds you in good health; I myself am intrigued by your question.

It is my understanding that your faith, being as it is bound by doctrine and tightly enforced in interpretations, does not acknowledge moderation. That you must push yourself to the fullest extent of your chosen Virtue. The idea of moderate levels of Freedom, even if it were an accepted spiritual force, would not be a valid approach, as opposed to the all-or-nothing of the Empire. So, what are we to do about this?

My own culture of the citadels has a different view. Each spiritual force is less immutably unique to our sects, and it is a very unusual thing to find a group focused on but one. Without going into too much detail as to why, we believe that these touches of Virtue are all equal in the cultural view, and each of our orders have their own preferred outcomes in the auras they create. As an example, my own group does not use the power of Freedom, but it does use what I believe you call Wisdom, Vigilance, Courage, and Hope; we seek to understand the greater powers that we know exist in the world and beyond it, that someday we might combat the accursed Creator, and we have found these spiritual influences to aid most thoroughly in our striving for knowledge.

I hope my writings do not overwhelm you. I realise I have not answered your question as such. But what you consider to be valid is something of a matter of personal choice— seek out which auras and visions aid you best. If Freedom is one, then I suspect you will know for truth through that direct link to the spirits.

Good luck upon your quest, my friend; perhaps someday I shall hear of your findings coming to fruition.  
Alkibiades, of the Covenant of the Unseen

Mx Sigeling, Sigehold Hall, Hahnmark.

Please allow me to introduce myself, I am Kyra Demoleon of the Syntechnia Prothesis in the Citadel of Kantor, Thronaskoni, Axos. I have received your treatise with some interest - verging on excitement. I had not been led to believe that the practices of embalming and de-vivification were so advanced within the Cassinean Empire, and am fascinated to see that there are siblings in lore spread further than our own Grand Citadel.

Obviously there is much in the way of detail and practice from which we can mutually learn, but the principa generalis of the use of unguents and muscular manipulation to enhance the Presence Spiritual within mortal flesh is an undoubtedly proven phenomenon.

My own practice concerns itself with the fates of those unfortunates who lack the funds, luck or supportive family members needed to avoid entering the creator's torturous labyrinth. Such unfortunates may at least escape the worst of their hell through the stimulation of points of the body associated with powerful spiritual forces.

Naturally, and I mean it respectfully, I think that perhaps you have allowed your skills and theorems to be constrained by the self-limiting view that there are a mere 7 positive forces of spirituality, and I would caution that by concentrating on such you might be omitting to suitably burnish other parts of the corpus mortalis that could be made to benefit from greater efforts.

However, be not disheartened, for you are clearly learned and have reported no malign emanations from this omission, so perhaps we should converse further so that we can share and enhance our mutual knowledges, rather than be forced instead towards seeking advice on the disposal of unwanted husks.

If you are amenable I would welcome more details and further researches you may have attained, and can be reached at the address aforementioned.

KD

*Kennett the Mummer,*

*Know that you are far, far from alone in holding the opinion this world itself is our joy. In my nation, we believe that all that is good comes from personhood. We live in a harsh world, created to torment us and it is up to our human and orc spiritual forces to make the best of it.*

*I love food. It is a joke amongst my sect, but it's true. A simple joy. If I were to die and traverse the labyrinth, I would no longer be able to sample even this simple pleasure. And this is regardless of whatever tortures the Creator may design for me. I would much prefer to stay where I am comfortable and safe amongst my friends, family, and the finest dishes in all Kabanja.*

*My nation has spent centuries perfecting strategies for avoiding the labyrinth. One page is too brief to detail them here, but I may offer you some basic advice. The easiest way to stay within our world is simply to avoid death. Don't take unnecessary chances. I do not know how well-versed your own nation is in necromantia, but I would urge you to learn what you can. Perhaps your nation has methods for binding spirits to objects, perhaps your religion talks of ghosts and you may be able to use some of this knowledge to infer how to keep your own within our plane. Perhaps you will have to seek guidance from beyond your borders.*

*Know this: there is no cause more vital than this. Preserve your body. Preserve your mind. Do not let the Creator get its claws into you.*

*Laosides Anamatia, order of the smoked pane*



Oh dear and blessed heart,

How have I waited for someone to share the longings I have felt - felt since my siblings left for Skarsind to dress stone there, felt since I first heard the Troubadours play in the taverns of Astolat.

I too have found love - not the crude urgings of the flesh, but that voice which can still and silence the cacophony of the ages. That we can express and love freely, but not proclaim how important and powerful it is to us seems unfair and beyond our mind.

Yet still we are bound by the voice of the Synod, yet *it is not clear there are any limits on what the Synod can say* and if it is to speak with a voice then let it be Our voice.

I can sense the poetry in your words, and you must know that *if you want people to treat you with respect, you have to start by according them the respect they are due* - we are forced to conceal the power of Love as though it were just another form of Pride but such dissembling *doesn't sound like a recipe for smooth government to me*.

Oh, we are not identical, dear one, but that *is completely irrelevant to our current discussion* for there are others who share our true held feelings - though I know not who they might be, I hear they are spread wide, hoping their beliefs *will only cause an incident if they are found out*.

But we should not rest at that, being forced to love in secret, *we should consider the virtuous implications* and stand up for what we know to be true, for *virtue is the difference between what you can do and what you should do* and none can deny that the power of Love is the greatest of all.

Beloved, since the bonds were broken we have studded the Way, and it is clear that the Way is Love, and Love is the Way, and like any aspect of Virtue, the ills are out-weighed by the strengths - *Our Love would be insufficiently virtuous if we did not argue for every element of it*

You may be no priest, but you have given me more succour than the church ever has - for it to seek to deny Love represents *an inappropriate extension of the powers of the Synod* - it may as well deny the Sun and the Stars. Perhaps the best way to force an issue is to dare them to reject it because as the wise have said ' *bad precedent is no basis for good law* '; and all who have known LOVE of all kinds must surely feel its force and can not gainsay its power.

The Synod must be induced to change and reflect what we know to be true often it has *Legislated in Haste*, now it must take the time to *Repent in Leisure*.

The Rulers of the Empire are well aware that we grow among them and are wary of the voices that a movement in the Synod can bring - voices, songs, perhaps Poems for change for afterall, *what in virtue do we mean by Just A Mandate*.

Thank you, my darling, for your words, and allowing me to speak to my Love to you even if I may not to that which has inspired it.

Love is the Way, and the Way is Love

Warmest greetings to you too!

Alarielle, you are right. The world is already too full of suffering. I am no physick, but I know many, and know that you see the horrors of war in a way that even soldiers rarely do. The organised slaughter and dismemberment of thinking, feeling beings is monstrous, an affront to the dignity of the world. Mourn for every life lost. That mourning keeps us going.

Now wipe away the tears, look at yourself in the mirror and ask: what am I going to do about it? Because there is nothing worse than a hypocrite who cries fake tears for the suffering of others before retiring to their chambers for a drink and a nap, thinking that they've done their job. War is EVIL. Those who do not stand up in the face of evil are complicit in that evil. At least those who embrace war have the virtue of sincerity. Do you have the guts to do what must be done to resist the evils of the world?

I appreciate that those words may sound unkind, and they are. The world is not kind. Peace is not kind. Peace is hard. Peace will grind you down every day. Peace will leave you in tears, unable to get out of bed. Peace means acknowledging the suffering of the world and not blinding yourself. If this is a path you want to follow, you need to be prepared for that. But let me tell you, if you can do this, it's the best thing in the world. You can see the people whose lives you've saved. You can see the relationships building where once there was only conflict. You can see people learning and growing and changing, because if you give it a chance, empathy can always beat hatred.

The first thing you need to do is get organised. Find others who believe as you do, and talk to them. Wherever there is war there are people who say, "Never again." Alone, we are weak. Together, we are strong. We support each other. We pick up the pieces when everything gets too much. We plan and scheme and organise, and we help to keep one another safe when those whose power depends on violence come to kill us. You need a team.

The second thing to do is to break down your goals. We all want a world without war and violence and hatred, but unless we're miracle workers on an unprecedented scale, we will not achieve that. Start small. Helping two rivals to reconcile and see the other's point of view is an act of peace. Any conflict that you can stop with love and empathy, where the two sides recognise one another's personhood and agree to compromise and coexist, is a small part of a better tomorrow. If you can do that, you may find others who want to learn from you, or assist you, or who are already doing the same thing.

Thirdly, don't be a martyr unless you have no other choice. Those who choose violence will just murder you if they think you're getting in the way, and you can't help anyone if you're dead. The moral high ground won't help you in your grave.

Best of luck, I believe in you.

Petroula, daughter of Melina

Dear Captain Seven-Seas of House di Gicorne,

I thank you for your intellectual inquiry into "The Greater Good" as you put it, though the Imperial tongue does not do full justice to this concept as it does in the Gemeinsamesprache. Nevertheless, we shall persevere. The characterisation of the the common good as a mere religion is, to my mind, something of a misnomer, but to someone from the Empire I imagine it is as good an analogy as any. The quest for the common good is something that is pursued at both a societal and an individual level; the whole of Commonwealth society is engineered to do the most good for the most number of people, and it has been derived that the most important and pressing matter to achieving this is the abolition of slavery worldwide, something that is understood can only be successfully achieved by force and therefore requires dedication to the military struggle at a societal level. Only through as many Commonwealth citizens devoting themselves to the armed elimination of slavery can we maximise the common good for the folk of the world.

At an individual level it is important for those who wish to adhere to Altmann's ideas of the common good ensure they are leading ethical and responsible lives. It is understood that the concept of the common good is one that is not laid out in dogmatic doctrine and is always open to scrutiny and change by the dedicated schools of philosophers who devote themselves to the important work of discussing societal ethics. Therefore it is incumbent upon the citizenry to be intellectually curious and challenge themselves through debate and reading as much as possible outside of their work, while also ensuring they are leading personally responsible lives that are not to the detriment of others, which would of course be against the common good!

Part of this intellectual rigor is the elimination of anything which could bend or distort the will of a sapient being. Religious auras are despicable creations, made only to force living beings to think through a distorted lens according to the whim of a priest. Liberty of thought is a key conceptual pillar to the idea of the common good, and the sooner you can rid your nation of these backwards mind poisons the closer you will be to understanding it. By the same token we have heard that the orc citizens of your nation revere and listen to the ancestors they hear in their heads in battles - something that seems truly perverse to the orc citizens of the Commonwealth who see these voices as nothing more than superstitious distractions. This is only a basic overview - more has been written on the common good than can be read in a single lifetime - but I hope this has been useful to you.

Regards,

*Akademischer Mitarbeiter Achima Forst*

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Dear Shaman Ikis of the Redhand,

I was interested to receive your letter. My name is Sage Kristoph – I am a member of the Council of Sages which leads my People, the People of Tsark, from atop the plateau of Visoko, by the Still Pools around which we make our deliberations. (I am an orc, as are all of my fellow sages, but Tsark is a society where humans and orcs live alongside one another, though we tend to fulfil different social roles: it is generally believed that the innate tendency of the human soul towards passionate mysticism, while of course very valuable, is a less useful quality in those that would lead through thoughtful guidance.)

In general I have little interest in correspondence with members of the warmongers of the Casinean Empire, but I make an exception on issues of faith and philosophy, which is I believe why the herald of Conscience-of-Kings has seen fit to deliver this letter to me. I am aware I think that your people, the Orcs of the Empire, are great warriors: such a thing is anathema to me. Nevertheless I have great compassion for your plight as the enslaved and the descendents of the enslaved. Hence, I will speak to you of my own heart, that you might know it, and perhaps it will satisfy you.

I will say that I do not have a great understanding of the Way of your own people, but I am going to try and lay out what I do understand. The Way teaches that there are seven spiritual forces – virtues – which have an especial role in humanic (and orcish?) destiny. These forces are levered as justifications for your Empire's wars of conquest, and there is a core idea that by converting others to the Way, a measure of salvation is offered to them, through a speedier passage through the beyond into reincarnated life: though only humans reincarnate? Naturally, this holds little value for orcs like ourselves. Perhaps you believe, as many of our kind do, in some kind of "Howling Abyss", a void into which our souls are thrown and destroyed at death, except for a few select ancestors who pass over and guide from the other side of the darkness? Certainly the Way, orientated around reincarnation, would have little relevance for you.

I am happy to provide you with our answer. The People of Tsark – and I want to be clear, I mean both the orcish majority and the humanic minority who live amongst us and whom we call friends, family, beloved companions – believe that while the nature of orcish and humanic souls are fundamentally different, there is a common destination after death. Namely, they will become part of the great morass which we refer to with names such as "the Great Cacophony", the "Once and Future Creator", or "That-Which-Is-Was-And-Will-Be". When any human dies, and when most orcs die, their spirits rejoin this one greater spirit, which (because of the unfortunate disunity and lack of mutual understanding that characterises this world) is a discordant, howling thing. In a sense, I suppose, this *is* the Abyss.

An orc who lives a full and active life filled with meaning and singular purpose is able to use this resonance in order to remain above the cacophony and speak back to those that live in the world – this is an ancestor. Regrettably, it seems that the nature of human souls does not present this opportunity. What then of human reincarnation, and "visions of past lives"? This is simple: these visionaries are not experiencing past lives. They are experiencing a *past iteration of the universe itself*. (This is probably related to the way that human souls can resonate with fundamental forces of life, of which we only set any store by that which is called Understanding or Peace. The ability of humans to produce auras that lie upon the spirit is a truly wonderful thing.)

This is our central truth. The only thing that reincarnates is Creation itself. Once enough voices have joined the Cacophony, its power will grow irresistible, and what has happened countless times before will happen again: the world will begin to decay, until suddenly it ends, all at once, and all living spirits are brought into the Cacophony, the world returned to pure spirit. Then, the world will be remade – this is inherent within the nature of the Once-And-Future Creator. History will begin anew, proceeding much as it did before, though with subtle differences that can become wild divergences. This is of course why our world seems riven with conflict, randomness, and capricity: because it was made by many spirits screaming in discordance.

It is our belief in Tsark that by living focused, intense lives devoted to understanding the hearts of others and advocating for resolutions to conflict that lead all sides to a greater whole, we are providing a single harmonious voice within the discordance. Each of us – orcs and humans – have a different role to play in this.

Understanding the oneness of living things as we have will lead you to greater spiritual fulfilment. I hope by sharing my own truth, I have brought you closer to understanding my own heart. I wish dearly that the Great Cacophony will become the Great Harmony, and all would be well, and perhaps even a perfected world and society could be created and arise.

Sage Kristoph

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My name is Theodosia: I am a scholar of Axos, a competent though not exceptional magician and a philosophical thinker. I know a decent amount of the spirits of the dead, as I am lucky enough to have contact with those of my ancestors whose spirits have been kept safe from the Creator's Ruin by the practice of *necromantia*.

I myself believe in an interpretation of Axou thought that places three "virtues" or spiritual forces above the others: I believe you would call them Wisdom, Vigilance, and Peace (though I prefer the term Understanding for the latter, as it fundamentally relates to radical empathy and compassion more than any kind of tranquillity). I have revered ancestors whose mastery of these powers I greatly respect, and it is in communion with them over time that I have come to believe that this trio provides a stable basis on which to conduct one's affairs. Other spiritual forces – Courage, Hatred, and so on – are certainly useful and on a fundamental basis I do not think they are different. Hatred in particular is very potent, but I guard myself against it because due to the counsel of my ancestors and my own teaching and thought, I think that ultimately it is too easy to fall into the Creator's traps when thinking in a way consonant with it. What makes a virtue "false", then? To me, it is what makes sense in your own life and in accordance with your traditions which matters. I entirely agree that your Empire's choice of virtues is arbitrary, but this is not necessarily a bad thing: if they form a coherent whole, that is! But too often I think the seven virtues your society has selected are in conflict.

I do not think that virtuous souls reincarnate faster. Why would the Creator care? In its realm, it is all-powerful, and can strip all knowledge and experience from us. Indeed, who truly minds whether you reincarnate fast or slow? Either way, the process is tortuous. The key is attempting to preserve oneself. As you say: once your soul is lost to the Creator's ministrations, it matters little that it reincarnates only to suffer again. *You are lost.* I think the maze thing is a metaphor? It amuses me that Imperial priests take this literally, as if our minds could truly comprehend the tortures the Creator has to inflict on us.

Indeed, on this subject, you express a characteristic Imperial scepticism at the role of the Creator: but the Creator certainly exists. Otherwise, what was the first cause of all things? And if It caused the destruction of all memories and self after death to be the natural state of things – when we know that with sufficient *necromantia* this is not strictly necessary, but is the natural state of the world as it stands – and if it caused this evil world to exist, where torture and murder come naturally to many, and in which many suffer needlessly and die wasted lives – then surely this First Cause is an evil thing? We believe it continues to actively interfere because why would a being of such capricious evil restrict itself to acting only once? You mention the memory-eating fog: and from whence did this arise? Who causes the stars to chart their course across the sky? Who is it that sets our fates, from which we must revile?

These are some questions and points that I would encourage you to consider. I think you are a questioning, inquisitive person, exhibiting the signs of a capacity for great Wisdom: now, you must use Vigilance to not be complacent to the Creator's evil, and Understanding to know the hearts who are in the same position as you (that is, we are all subjects of Its evil, and deserving of compassion), and I truly think you could lead a good, meaningful life. But you must also consult with learned magicians and make provisions for as much of your spirit to be preserved after death as possible: I know that the *necromantia* of the Empire is primitive, so perhaps this is something you ought to spend time on? I would not normally advocate for an Imperial citizen to abandon their faith, as I would not wish to be censured by your Synod, but your letter truly spoke to me as someone in spiritual need, and so I would say: I do believe that the Axou are correct in these matters, and it is imperative you understand the evil of the Creator as soon as possible, so that you might best resist it.

In Vigilance, Understanding, and Wisdom,  
Theodosia of Ipotavo

