

Echoes of the Labyrinth

Volumes 2a2d: Winter Solstice 377 YE to Autumn Equinox 378 YE

A collection of notes on the experience of
Pure Liao Visionaries, collected by

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&

Livia of the Celestial Cascade of Urizen

by the direction and authority of the Council of Nine.

Edition 1, printed after Autumn Equinox 378 YE

Winter Solstice 377 YE accounts taken by Hywel Summer Crow and Livia Cascade; writeups and commentary by Livia Cascade.
Spring Equinox 378 YE accounts taken by Livia Cascade; writeups and commentary by Livia Cascade.
Summer Solstice and Autumn Equinox 378 YE accounts taken by Hywel Summer Crow and Livia Cascade; writeups and commentary by Livia Cascade.

Information contained here is incomplete; future editions of this pamphlet may contain more information as the authors consult again with the visionaries and their guides, particularly for the information returned to visionaries by the Civil Service as a result of their inquiries.

These notes were taken from verbal testimonies of witnessed events, so spellings and exact pronunciations of names should not be considered definitive.

Winter Solstice, 377 YE

Introduction

Six visionaries experienced visions induced by Pure Liao at the Solstice. Of these, one was selected by the winners of the Virtuous Auction, and five by the Council of Gatekeepers.

Following their visions, the visionaries and their accompanying guides were questioned by the authors. Their stories are recorded in the following pages, in the order that the visions were received.

* Valentin of the Vale of Gorazin (Varushka), accompanied by Serrusto of the Gilded Horn Carra, Tassato (League)

* Jonah of Cantiarth's Hold (Highguard), accompanied by Lazarus of Cantiarth's Hold

* Rosamund Holt of King's Stoke (Marches), accompanied by Ed Warcher of King's Stoke

* Cora Holdfast (Navarr), accompanied by Carwyn Holdfast

* Livra of Celestial Cascade (Urizen), accompanied by Cyrus of Celestial Cascade

* Solomon of the Shattered Tower (Highguard), accompanied by Enoch of the Shattered Tower

Valentin of the Vale of Gorazin (Varushka)

Accompanied by Serrusto of the Gilded Horn Carra, Tassato (League)

Valentin was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented separately by the visionary and guide.

The visionary came to in a hall decorated with furs, with axes and shields on the wall, a fire in the corner, and a long campaign table with silverware laid out. There was an orc servant or slave there wearing blue, waiting on the people at

the table.

A man who had been lying down got up and sat at the table and the visionary sat opposite him. The man addressed the visionary as his brother, and congratulated them on the success of their military campaign, which had been happening at the end of the right of Emperor Guntherm. The visionary's name was apparently Matheus, and the brother's name was Naea.

They discussed the campaign for a short while. Mention was made of a crown passed from hero to hero, with the phrase "three tears in the crown," involved in the conversation.

A woman wearing furs entered, and addressed the visionary's brother as Stormcrow. The woman was Captain Naea, and brought a scroll with orders from the new Empress to cancel the current plans to march into Skarsind against the Jotun. The visionary thought the man and woman had a dark blaze or bands over their eyes.

The man was trying to decide whether to follow the orders or not, and argued that they could push the Jotun back and crush them once and for all. (The visionary reportedly heard that the Jotun could be pushed back to somewhere called Niflheim - reference to modern maps suggests this could have been a mishearing of the Gildenheim region in Skarsind, or the Jotun port of Kierhein.)

The man asked the visionary for advice on what they should do. The visionary, with advice from their guide priest, argued for ignoring the orders and attacking, saying that it would be loyal to the Empire to do so - the visionary and the man discussed the options with reference to all of the Virtues. As part of the discussion it was mentioned that if the attack failed then Semmersaq would be left undefended.

When they had finished discussing, the man said "Very well, it is decided then, we will attack", and the vision ended.

Near the beginning of this vision, while the guide was moving around he caused

some armour lying on a chair to shift. This did not seem to be apparent to the man and woman in the vision, but is possibly the cause of an injury to the guide's soul that caused it to twist around on itself, requiring exorcism with the possible assistance of a physick.

The effects of this injury were that after the vision, the guide perceived the passage of time out of order, and was unsure whether events had already happened or were about to happen. This has been taken into account when reconciling the guide's and the visionary's accounts.

Jonah of Cantiarth's Hold (Highguard)

Accompanied by Lazarus of Cantiarth's Hold (Highguard)

Jonah was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented separately by the visionary and guide.

The visionary came to having woken up in bed, got up, and was greeted by a captain with a bandage across one eye. The captain address the visionary as Tom Drake, a Marcher general. They were surrounded by other captains and leaders who were discussing a battle plan.

The other leaders included a naga commanding two groups of archers, possibly Unconquered; two captains, one male and one female; and a cambion woman who was a mage suggesting rituals to held defences and offensives.

The plan was to protect a small village of humans, possibly in Varushka, from husks and a tyrant. (The visionary did not catch the name but the guide reported it as Alderet.)

The army protecting it was made of two blocks of 500 troops from Varushka, two groups of 150 Highborn cavalry, one group of 500 Highborn cataphracts, three 500-troop pike blocks from the Marches, and two blocks of 500 archers.

The cavalry were to protect the village on a bridge over nearby swampland. The pike blocks and cataphracts were to pick off husks and face the enemy mages and tyrant who were resurrecting the husks.

The lineage mage who was suggesting rituals said she could collapse a forest near the village, and use all her mana on several rituals: one to collapse the forest on the enemy when they marched through, one to clear the forest when their own troops were marching through, and one to collapse the exit when husks came through.

The captains and leaders discussed the battle plan, and then there was a knock at the door, someone asked if they were battling, and the vision ended.

Jonah's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after his vision. Before the vision, his soul had a dedication to Courage.

After the vision, as well as the dedication to Courage, his soul also had a testimony of "Fierce Leader" with the strength equivalent to 7 priests behind it.

Damaris's vision at Winter 376 YE seemed to imply that testimonies that appear on visionaries' souls after visions are - or at least could reasonably be - testimonies that had been applied ceremonially to the soul in the normal way one does, during that past life at some point.

The testimony appearing at the strength of 7 priests could be due to some sort of magnifying effect caused either by the Labyrinth itself, or by the Pure Liao used in the ceremony.

Like Linden's vision at Autumn 377 YE, there was no testimony applied during this vision. Among the possibilities for why this testimony came about are:

* This was a testimony applied to Tom Drake at some point during his life by a priest, and the process that the visionary went through when experiencing or returning from the vision caused their soul to retain it into their current incarnation.

* This was not a testimony applied to Tom Drake at any point during his life,

but some sort of metaphysical comment, either about Drake's life in general or about the events in the vision.

The more likely explanation with what we know so far is that these testimonies are carried over from the past life. The explanation needed for that is simpler - that of some connection being formed between the state of the soul in a past life and the state of the soul in the current life - and could reasonably be an effect of the Pure Liao ceremony. A comment on the soul raises the question of "who or what put it there", so is more complicated and thus less likely.

Rosamund Holt of King's Stoke (Marches)

Accompanied by Ed Watcher of King's Stoke (Marches)

Rosamund was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for this account to be made public after the Summer 378 YE summit.

The visionary came to in a place with broken stone pillars, with birdsong and the sound of a waterfall in the air around, in a circle surrounded by flowers, candles and wooden figures of people. They were holding a knife in one hand, and the other was on a mound of moss in front of them. There were moving and shuffling plants and flowers in the area around them.

A figure appeared to the visionary, and called them by name (either Meliana or Mellinar). The figure's voice sounded male, and he was covered in bark and had vines in his hair. He asked "how is our child" and how the ritual was - at this point the visionary noticed a scroll near them, which was a scroll for a ritual invoking the Forest Mother to protect children that otherwise might not be born.

The figure in bark seemed concerned for the visionary's wellbeing, and addressed them as a lover might. It felt to the visionary like a very intimate scene - part of the ritual scroll involved being "as undressed as a mother's modesty allowed" (although this would not have been apparent to the visionary and

guide themselves as they would only see themselves in the ceremonial cassock and veil). The figure in bark was also amazed and impressed that the visionary had done everything in this ritual under their own power. He said that the visionary should make sure people know who had done this all (possibly referring to creating the ritual).

He asked a few times what to call the child, and what to call the children of the child, and the visionary said it should be his choice. He said that when the visionary had cast the ritual on their child, and it had been born and lived, then when it died it would go to his realm; while it lived it would be the visionary's.

The ritual scroll invoked Rhyw and Eyrom, and mentioned pennyroyal, sylphium and nutmeg (the visionary noted that the first two of these are contraceptive). Part of the scroll mentioned that this ritual wad particularly suitable to be used on children of lineage - naga and cambion were on the list but the visionary is not sure if brnar were listed. The visionary had started to perform the ritual, and had put pennyroyal on themselves. The next step would be to anoint their belly with blood drawn by a thorn and then drawn on the belly in the shape of Rhyw. At this point the vision faded.

Rosamund had her soul examined by the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision there were no marks on her soul of any sort. After the vision, there was a distinct echo of her past life present and overlaid on her soul (according to Rosamund, it made her feel even more protective towards brnars - Rosamund's own lineage - than before, and also felt like it could give her more power in calling on the realm of Spring in rituals).

At the time, the echo's effect on her soul was such that an exorcism performed by seven priests would have cleared it, but if it were left its effects might change for the worse. After thought and discussion - and talking to the herald of Yaw'hagrah who was the barked figure in her vision, Yith Silthar - Rosamund decided not to have the echo exorcised. Its effects on her soul had changed by the following summit - Insight only gave vague impressions, but Bright Lantern of Ophis showed there was a Spring curse of the twentieth magnitude as a result. The curse could be dealt with by the imposition of a Testimony or Anointing (with the strength of seven priests) that asserted Rosamund's current

identity, and at Rosamund's request this was done.

Ed, the guide, also had his soul examined after the vision as his behaviour seemed odd. His soul appeared to be reined and coiled like a spring, with the effect that he was paranoid and suspicious of others. The effect was relatively mild and only took three priests to exorcise.

The visions seen by Rosalene Novarion in Spring 378 YE and Rosamund Holt in Winter 377 YE are quite possibly related. No name is given for Lord Rowan's wife, but a child of a human woman and a Spring herald appears in both, and the name that Rosalene and her guide heard for the Spring herald is close enough to Ylith Silthar to be possible. Both visionaries are aware of each other's visions from discussing this with each other.

Cora Holdfast (Navarr)

Accompanied by Carwyn Holdfast (Navarr)

Cora was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary with some assistance from her guide.

The visionary came to in what appeared to be a cave, with dripping sounds echoing in it. To the visionary's right was what looked like a line of skulls along the wall. In front was a line of one-handed weapons along the wall, and there was moss or vines or other foliage growing on the other walls.

There was a man standing in front of them. He was wearing a white shirt and a black waistcoat or arming jack with fur trim. He had dark hair, and fine facial features and cheekbones.

The man handed the visionary a crossbow, and said that this was the only way that the warlock wouldn't know what was going on, and that the visionary needed to point the crossbow at him and take him prisoner. He said this was for the Empire, and for others that he named. He also mentioned that he was the visionary's brother.

Three people - two orcs, and one other figure in a cloak, with human skin and possibly lineage - came in. The orcs congratulated the visionary, calling her Nataria and saying that the warlock would be pleased. The cloaked figure did not talk, but moved behind the visionary and peered at the visionary and the brother.

The orcs asked the brother his name and where he was from, and he answered Piorr and Varushka. One of the orcs started to ask another question, then said, "You know what, I really don't care." They then started a monologue about how more people had joined their cause, and if even more were to join then the weakness of the Empire would be exposed and it would fall.

The orc who had been monologuing told the visionary to kill Piorr. The visionary hesitated, and said, "I don't think I know how to use this", to which the orc replied, "It's very simple - pull the trigger." After a pause the visionary asked for a knife instead. When the visionary was given the knife, they walked over to Piorr. The orcs told him to kneel and the visionary held a knife at his throat and leaned in to talk to him, asking if this was what he really wanted, to which he said this was the only way and said, "Do it" loudly enough for the orcs to hear). The orcs seemed to be increasingly annoyed by the hesitation, and one asked if the visionary was squeamish, saying she obviously wasn't the woman they thought she was. The orc who had been talking came forward saying, "If you're too squeamish to do it, I'll do it". Piorr said to the visionary, "This is the only way", and the visionary replied, "No, it's not", at which point Piorr grabbed one of the weapons on the wall behind him, the visionary started forward towards the orcs with the knife, and the vision ended.

Cora's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after her vision. Before the vision, her soul had a dedication to Loyalty.

After the vision, her soul was still dedicated to Loyalty, but rather than its previous strength (that of one priest having performed the Dedication) it was at a strength as if 49 priests had performed it.

Cora's dedication was to Loyalty beforehand, so this did not cause a change in

the virtue she was dedicated to, but it will be interesting to see if any future visionaries do experience such a change in dedication, or the addition of a dedication to a virtue where there is not currently one.

The increase of strength of a spiritual effect on a visionary is something we've seen before with testimonies. As with testimonies, this increase in the strength of a dedication could have been:

* Spontaneously generated on the visionary as a result of the vision, but not present on the past life's soul.

* On the soul in the past life, carried through to the current incarnation as a result of the vision and magnified in strength.

As with testimonies, I think it being a past effect carried over and magnified is more likely.

However, increases of strength of spiritual effects have been to 7 for the testimonies we have seen previous to this. Going to 49 presents many possibilities, among them the following:

* The past dedication was at a strength of 7 because of multiple priests dedicating the past life, and this was then increased sevenfold as a result of this vision.

* The past dedication was at a strength of 7 because the past life had also undergone a past life vision of their own, and had an initial dedication magnified as a result of that, which this vision then further magnified.

* The past dedication was at a strength of 1 but was for some reason much more greatly magnified this time. For example, as a result of the past life or the visionary having exhibited great Virtue during the vision.

As this is only one instance, we do not have enough information yet to make a better assumption of what caused this effect rather than a different one (such as an increase in Dedication to only an effective strength of 7 priests rather than 49).

Livia of Celestial Cascade (Urizen) Accompanied by Cyrus of Celestial Cascade (Urizen)

Livia was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary with some assistance from her guide.

The visionary came to standing in a room with a table in one corner, a bed laid out in another, and an orc servant or slave waiting in a third corner.

On the table was a letter addressed to Teacher Mani of the Scions of Atun, from someone in the Order of the White Rose with a possibly Freeborn name, starting with Saboria. The letter concerned the preparation of something, and its first paragraph said that "fermenting for another hour may render it more efficacious".

Two men in white robes and hoods, with renacled faces (probably strongly lineaged merrow) entered the room, with another man with facial tattoos who looked Navarri. The Navarri man gave his name as Aar, and commented on how good the horses were, comparing them to walking the trods.

Aar wondered what they had been doing with all the vinum they had been buying from him. One of the acolytes suggested that if Aar were given a demonstration of what was being done with it, he might be persuaded to lower his prices.

The acolyte said that the Teacher - referring to the visionary - had found a way to use vinum to aid concentration while awake, rather than just using vinum to aid sleep. He mentioned it caused visions, and Aar asked if they might be hallucinations or dreams instead, at which the other acolyte shouted "They are not dreams!"

The acolytes talked at one point about how they had come from over the seas, fleeing some sort of cataclysm or disaster, that they were trying to avoid a second such disaster, and that they were impure. One of the acolytes commented that the Patriarchs washed their hands, but their souls were impure.

There was a cup on the table, possibly brought in by the orc, and the acolyte who was talking indicated that the visionary should give its contents to the other acolyte. Atar asked if this was safe, and the first acolyte said that of course it was, the Teacher was pure.

The visionary took the cup from the table and offered it to the second acolyte, who was repeating "The Holy Words are not enough" under his breath, almost as a mantra. The acolyte knelt down, the visionary offered him the cup, and then the acolyte suggested he should sit on the bed just in case. When he had gone and sat on the bed, the visionary gave him the cup, saying, "Drink, drink and be pure". The acolyte drank and lay down.

The visionary went back over to the table to look at its contents. As well as the letter from before there was a sheet of paper with a list of rows. Each row had a name, a family name, an astronomic sign, a date, a source of something (the most common of these was "High Bastion", according to the guide), and a column of results, which included entries like "Dead", "Feverish (3 weeks)" and "Coma". The dates were between 226 and 236 (no YE with the dates). The names were in the form "Something i Somethingelse", the family names in the second column were not the same as the second part of the name, and the entries in the family name column did not appear to contain the Freeborn clan names. There was also a veridigris copper candlestand on the table in the shape of a horse.

The first acolyte (the one who had not drunk) talked to the visionary quietly, and said that people were getting suspicious about so many acolytes disappearing. He suggested that if Atar disappeared, they could blame the acolytes' disappearances on a lethally bad batch of vinum from Navarr. He seemed to be asking for assent to blame Atar or have him killed, and the visionary gave their assent.

The acolyte on the bed started convulsing and coughing, and the visionary and the others turned their attention back to him. There was blood on the convulsing visionary's cowl, which he had pulled up over his face.

When he had finished convulsing the acolyte on the bed sat up slowly, and the visionary asked him what he had seen. The acolyte replied that he had seen a great shining and pure city, a place from back across the sea where they had come from, and he said they would be pure again. The acolyte asked if this was a vision of what had been or what was to come, and the vision ended.

Livia's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after her vision. Before the vision, her soul had a dedication to Wisdom.

After the vision, her soul was still dedicated to Wisdom, but rather than its previous strength (that of one priest having performed the Dedication) it was at a strength as if 7 priests had performed it. Her soul also had a testimony of "Teacher" with the strength equivalent to 7 priests behind it.

As with Cora's vision earlier in Winter 377 YE, a dedication of increased strength makes sense given previous behaviour of testimonies. It being of strength equivalent to 7 priests also indicates that dedication is not automatically magnified more than testimony (unlike Cora's dedication).

Likewise, as with Damaris's, Linden's and Jonah's visions, a testimony of increased strength matches previous behaviour of testimonies. It is also interesting to note this testimony is only a single noun, rather than the two-word noun phrases seen on the other post-vision new testimonies.

Given the contents of the vision, and common historical accounts about when visionary versus ceremonial liao were discovered, it seems unlikely that the testimony and dedication could have been on the past life's soul before the events of the vision began, since the liao that would be needed to add them had not yet been successfully prepared. With this in mind, the main possibilities seem to be:

* Historical records are unclear or incorrect: liao ceremonies such as Dedication and Testimony were developed earlier than previously thought and had already been developed and applied at the time of this vision, meaning that visions being granted were not the first use of liao as usually stated.

* As suggested in some other accounts, the dedication and testimony here were applied to the soul in this past life, but at a later point in their life than the

events seen in the vision, and the spiritual effects that are transferred to the current incarnation are those that the soul held in its past life at the point that it entered the Labyrinth.

* The dedication and testimony were spontaneously generated on the visionary's soul as a result of the vision, but were not on the past life's soul.

The most likely of these explanations would seem to be the second - if the first were true then it is more likely the ceremonial form of Iao would have been mentioned in the vision, which it was not. The notes on Jonah's testimony earlier in this document explain why the third is less likely than the second.

Immediately following the vision, the visionary also had a feeling of focus and calm that lasted for a short while. This could have been the echo of an anointing such as the Focus of Wisdom, or could have been an echo of one of the common attributes of the merrow lineage. In either case, it will be worth asking visionaries for such effects after their visions, as if it was the aftereffect of lineage, it is the first indication we have in these records of something that could tell us about the lineage of past incarnations.

Solomon of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)

Accompanied by Enoch of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)

Solomon was selected by the winner of the Virtuous Auction.

The visionary gave his permission for this account to be made public after the Summer 378 YE summit.

The visionary came to kneeling over a body, holding a knife in their right hand. There was another man kneeling next to the body, apparently an accomplice, who was pulling fragments of paper out of his pouches and looking through them, talking to the visionary about which would be good to plant on the body. He called the visionary Leopold, and referred to the body as "pondscum" ("we got that pondscum good" and "you did that pondscum" among other comments); it seems the visionary had been the one to carry out the murder. The dead body was lineage'd - either merrow or briar based on marks on their

neck. The man referred to the Professor as someone who had sent them or who they worked for. The man had also taken a purse from the dead body that contained several Thrones.

From the noises and sighs around, they were in the back room of a bar at night; there were the sounds of people in another room asking for the barkeep, and the noise of seagulls.

There were then noises of people coming towards the room they were in, and the man pulled the visionary behind a bar or kitchen counter to hide. Two people (one man, one woman) came into the room, wearing doublet and hose and carrying halberds; they looked like town militia.

The militia officers were shocked when they saw the body, and talked about how "the Prince will have our heads for this". The woman commented that it wasn't her fault they'd not stopped it, as she'd been on the north wall all day. They talked about similar murders, including one of a briar; it seemed this was part of a series.

The accomplice had been persuading the visionary to stay quiet and hidden, but after a while he stood up and asked "Thank goodness, are they gone?" and the visionary followed suit. The militia officers did not appear to believe this ruse and commented that they weren't very panicky, to which the visionary replied, "No, we are panicky". The militia officers, still suspicious, raised their weapons and advanced on them, and the vision faded.

Solomon's soul was examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, there were no marks on his soul of any sort. After the vision, there was a distinct echo of his past life present and overlaid on his soul - its effects were to make him singlemindedly focussed and annoyed by distraction. (Fortunately he channelled his focus after the vision into having his account recorded.)

The echo's effect on his soul was cleared by an exorcism performed by seven priests. At the time, Solomon asked that his vision not be made public until he knew more about it, but once he had received further details from the Civil

Service of the circumstances surrounding its events, he gave permission.

Solomon's Civil Service return indicates a series of murders in Tassato around 300 YE aimed at citizens of lineage. There were suspicions by the city's militia warrant officers and magistrates that these murders were linked to a radical element of the Society of the Purifying Flame, but there was no evidence to support this initially.

(According to the Civil Service return, the Society of the Purifying Flame was originally a penitent order of Highborn lineage who sought to "purify" their "tainted" souls by mortification and great devotion to the Paths of Virtue. From another return, that for Livia Cascade's vision, their activities in Highguard in the past also included erasing mention of lineage from historical accounts of citizens, though such erasures may have been compounded by many archivists and others simply forgetting to mention lineage for other reasons, such as a lack of societal disapproval of lineage and thus considering it to be unnecessary to point out)

In this period in Tassato, the Society of the Purifying Flame had recruited Archbishop Benedict di Tassato and his fellow priests of the Way to their cause. A militia warrant officers, Mario di Regarto, agreed to train as a bishop and join the Tassato branch of the society under Archbishop Benedict.

Bishop Mario was successful in gathering evidence that Archbishop Benedict was coordinating and participating in the murder of lineage citizens. In some cases this involved excommunicating them first with the intent that they would not be reborn and their "train" would die with them.

The evidence that Bishop Mario gathered resulted in Archbishop Benedict's arrest and subsequent execution. However, as part of his infiltration, Mario had also actively participated in murders of lineage citizens in order to prove his commitment to the cause. The Cardinal of Vigilance pleaded clemency for Mario's actions, but the magistrates concluded that Mario had knowingly taken the lives of Imperial citizens. He was sentenced to penal military service, during which he was killed in battle.

It is not clear from the details from Solomon's vision exactly who he was, but it seems most likely that he is the reincarnation of either Bishop Mario or Archbishop Benedict.

Spring Equinox, 378 YE

Introduction

Four visionaries experienced visions induced by Pure Liao at the Solstice. Of these, all four were selected by the Council of Gatekeepers. The winner of the Virtuous Auction at the Winter Solstice 377 YE had chosen instead to receive a vision at the Summer Solstice 378 YE summit.

Following their visions, the visionaries and their accompanying guides were questioned by the authors. Their stories are recorded in the following pages, in the order that the visions were received.

* Karin i Hazana i Guerra (Brass Coast), accompanied by Darius i Esmara i Erigo (Brass Coast)

* Cesare di Tassato of the Gilded Horn Carta (League), accompanied by

Ophelia of the Gilded Horn Carta (League)

* Rosalene Novarion (Dawn), accompanied by Marrok de Carsenere (Dawn)

* Agnertha de Rondell (Dawn), accompanied by Asher of Felix's Warch (Highguard)

Karim i Hazana i Guerra (Brass Coast)
Accompanied by Darius i Esmara i Erigo (Brass Coast)

Karim was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary, with some help from his guide.

The visionary came to in a forest in Navarr, around a campfire. There were seven other people there, and they were eating apples. They were a Navarri coven called either the Four Leaf or the Five Leaf Coven (the visionary heard Four Leaf, the guide heard one person say Five Leaf). The visionary's name was Emrys.

The coven were discussing how to get enough dragonbone to make covenstones. They had previously been casting the ritual Verdant Bounty of the Twilight Bayou to improve the yield they obtained in a forest. The visionary had notes in front of them that suggested they could either do this, or could attempt a ritual that would do the same for all the forests across the Empire - the latter would be a massive risk, but more prosperous. The visionary commented "What's another word for a risk? An opportunity!"

Rather than just covenstones, the visionary apparently wanted to build roads, fortifications and other larger works with the output of this. There was a discussion that the price of dragonbone was going to be very volatile, as the Sunnah Republic had just closed its borders to the Empire, and the coven wanted to make themselves financially independent rather than relying on Sunnah. (This dates the vision to around or shortly after 118 YE, the year that Sunnah excommunicated the Empire and closed its borders.)

Someone in the coven said that the visionary had suggested they could get help with casting this ritual from Muric. The visionary gave a speech urging the rest of the coven to help them, saying that this ritual would affect their children and their children's children, and that they should not just use this to make covenstones as the rest of the coven were suggesting.

The others in the coven seemed to be won over by the visionary's argument. When the visionary asked "Okay, who's in on this?", they all raised their hands, and the vision ended.

The ritual mentioned in the vision sounds like the one codified in Imperial lore as Wondrous Forests of Night, a Night ritual of approximate magnitude 160, with the effect mentioned in the vision (improving the potential yield of materials gathered from forests across the Empire). Karim was engaged in gathering people to try to perform this at the summit at which he received this vision.

Karim's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after his vision. Before the vision, there were no effects on his soul. After the vision, there was a testimony of "Flickering Candle" with the strength equivalent to 7 priests behind it.

The significance of the testimony here is not as immediately apparent as from previous visionaries who have had testimonies appear on their souls after visions. It may relate to the events that happened in the vision, or to other events that happened earlier or later in that past life. The results of Civil Service research into Karim's past life may be able to shed more light on this.

In what has become a standard check, Darius (the guide) also had his soul examined after the vision. His soul had been injured in such a way that it was coiled and tensed, with the effect that he was increasingly fearful of undergoing such experiences again. Treating this injury required an exorcism with the strength of 7 priests to remove the injury, although it is likely that an appropriate anointing of the same strength would have helped the visionary's soul to repair the injury itself.

Cesare di Tassato of the Gilded Horn Carta (League)
Accompanied by Ophelia of the Gilded Horn Carta (League)

Cesare was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary and then by the guide, with discussion between the two.

The visionary came to in a room that was either a banquetting hall or a plush dining room. There were silks and wall hangings, and a table that was laid out for a feast with the visionary at the head of the table. Next to the visionary on the table was a goblet that appeared to be finely crafted - it was a squat, short-stemmed goblet, made of dull silver, without any engraving. There was music and the sounds of chatter.

A servant came and spoke to the visionary, asking if they were ready, to which the visionary replied that they were as ready as they would ever be. The visionary was referred to as Anabela.

The servant then ushered in six guests. Three were from Regario, and three from Mestra. The group from Regario was led by Isabella, a maga, accompanied by an unlineaged man and woman. The group from Mestra was led by Bartolomeo, a cambion who was thin and sharp-featured with dark hair, accompanied by an unlineaged man in a dark doublet and an unlineaged woman in a fine dress and hat.

Isabella and Bartolomeo argued between themselves about disagreements between Regario and Mestra. Someone from Mestra had gone missing, and someone from Regario had been killed and the body found; one of them accused the other of seizing a consignment of silk; the other made accusations of arson. One person commented that it would be easier to get a Highhorn off their horse than to get Isabella and Bartolomeo to work together.

During the discussion, Isabella mentioned justice, and the visionary said that justice was a very subjective word. Isabella replied, "Anabela, Justice is a virtue,

you know that," and the visionary let the matter drop.

The visionary brought the meeting to order, as the conversation was getting heated, and said there were better things to do. They quoted a League nursery rhyme about how you should build your tower higher than the other person's in order to compete, rather than just knocking it over or setting it on fire.

After this, the visionary talked to them about ceasing hostilities, and bringing Regario and Mestra together to form Tassato, named after the small island in the middle of the river Vassa. Bartolomeo commented that it sounded like the name had already been chosen, to which the visionary replied that of course it had, they'd prepared before the meeting, and perhaps Bartolomeo should have done the same. The visionary asked if the other two wanted to be pragmatists, to which Isabella replied that they couldn't have the future without the past, and how could they put things aside? The visionary's response was that Bartolomeo and Isabella did not have to be friends, but had to drop some of their disagreements - "you don't have to hold hands, just walk in the same direction".

The visionary named two great works that Regario and Mestra could cooperate on - a stock exchange, and two great theatres, one on each side of the river (one comedy, one tragedy), that would operate in competition. The mention of these great works piqued Isabella and Bartolomeo's interest. They also discussed another great work, of making a bridge across the Vassa between Regario and Mestra that would put Anabela's ferry business out of business. To this, the visionary replied, "Do you think I'd start a ferry business on a river that could be bridged?"

The discussion concluded with Isabella and Bartolomeo having conceded some of their points, and admitting interest in the great works suggested. The visionary took their hands - Bartolomeo's in their left, and Isabella's in their right - and said "Think about it", and the vision ended.

Given the context of the vision, Cesare's past life was almost certainly Anabela di Regario, famed for uniting Regario and Mestra to form Tassato a century before the foundation of the Empire.

Cesare's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after his vision. Before the vision, his soul had a dedication to Ambition, a testimony of "Burning Asprant" with the strength of 3 priests, and the anointing of True Ambition with the strength of 3 priests.

After the vision, as well as the dedication, testimony and anointing, his soul appeared to be covered in a corrosive miasma, with the effect that he was highly suspicious of the motives of everyone around him and appeared to believe that everyone was planning to betray him. Treating this injury required an exorcism with the strength of 6 priests to remove the injury, although it is likely that an appropriate anointing of the same strength would have helped the visionary's soul to repair the injury itself. The exorcism was carried out in a consecrated area, and it is likely it (or an anointing, had that been done instead) would have required another priest, had the aura within the tent not been present.

Ophelia (the guide) also had her soul examined after the vision. Her soul had been injured in such a way that it was stretched out, as if she had left a piece of herself in the Labyrinth when she came back. This resulted in her being disoriented and unsure of who she was or of her surroundings. The reassurance of her family members helped to calm her and ground her in the present enough that an exorcism by Serrusto (Gatekeeper of Ambition, also a member of the Gilded Horn Cartel) was enough to remove the injury from her soul. Had her family not been there it is likely the exorcism would have required 7 priests.

Rosalene Novarion (Dawn)

Accompanied by Marrok de Carsenere (Dawn)

Rosalene was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary, with some help from her guide.

The visionary came to standing behind a screen, and moved out from behind the screen when they heard a noise. A male soldier with a brand on his cheek

charged into the room. He was dressed in Dawmish clothing.

The soldier referred to the visionary as Lord Rowan, and spoke of Lord Rowan's wife and her child (who was not the visionary's child, but the visionary and their wife had been raising the child together). He said that the child, which had been an experiment, was killing everyone, and that the visionary had to stop it.

Lord Rowan's wife was also present, and was begging the visionary to not kill the child, but instead give it to the herald that was its father and send it away to the herald's realm so that it would still be alive.

There was a plain, uncrafted sword in the room with them, and the visionary picked it up. They felt responsible for the deaths of the people who the child had killed, since they had raised it. The wife begged them not to go and kill the child, and said they would have to kill her if they wanted to kill it, but the visionary was firm in their decision and went to kill the child. The vision ended when they made this decision.

Rosalene's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after her vision, and had no effects on it before or after.

Marrok (the guide) also had his soul examined for spiritual effects before and after the vision. Before and after the vision he had a dedication to Vigilance.

After the vision his soul was also injured in such a way that it was quivering under his skin and flinching back, with the effect that he felt itchy and as if he could not get clean, and would have drawn blood by scratching at his skin if he had not been restrained. An Exorcism of strength 7 made his soul settle in its place, although an Anointing of strength 7 would have helped to soothe this soul sufficiently that the injury would have healed.

Agnetha de Rondell (Dawn)
Accompanied by Asher of Felix's Warch (Highguard)

Agnetha was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary and then by the guide, with discussion between the two.

The visionary came to holding a spear in their right hand and a box in their left hand. They were in conversation with two other people, a short woman and a tall man, in a small alcove off a larger room. The other two were wearing hoods and white robes.

The three of them discussed a plan to kill a herald they would be meeting soon - the plan was to hide the spear the visionary had, distract the herald, then kill the herald while it was distracted, cut its heart out and put it into the box the visionary had.

The visionary's past life's name was mentioned but all that the visionary and guide remember is that it started with a B, had three syllables, and included a "bah" or "guh" sound in it.

Once the three of them had gone over the plan, they placed their hands together and said "Omniscience is our birthright", and then moved into the larger room.

The larger room was hung in white drapes, and behind a drape in an alcove there were cushions on the floor. There was also a fir tree covered in snow, behind which the visionary hid the spear.

A herald entered, wearing black, with a black beaked face whose profile was like that of a puffin or a finch. The herald seemed to know the conspirators, and greeted them as if familiar with them. The other two talked to the herald, distracting it with a mention of "the secret of the Boyar" in order for it to get its

back to the visionary. When its back was turned, the visionary struck a single blow with the spear through its spine - either they were skilled with a spear or the spear was a very good one, as a single blow was enough to fell the herald.

Once the herald fell, the conspirators took the body off the spear and put it on a table, with very practiced movements. The shorter woman took the herald's heart out, and the visionary held out the box for the woman to put the heart inside. The visionary asked what their next step was, and the vision ended.

Either while the attack was being discussed, or directly after the herald had been killed, one of the conspirators mentioned that the heart was needed in order to "find the soul of Abraxus in the Labyrinth".

Agnetha's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after her vision. Before the vision, her soul had a dedication to Wisdom.

After the vision, as well as the dedication, there was what appeared to be a shadow over her soul. Unlike previous issues with visionaries' and guides' souls, the shadow here appeared to be too nebulous to be targeted by Exorcism. The effect of this shadow was to make Agnetha feel as though she was still in the Labyrinth and her surroundings were not truly real, and it also appeared to render her unable to sense or use lao for ceremonial purposes.

As a precaution, Asher's soul was also examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after he guided Agnetha on her vision. Before the vision, his soul had a dedication to Courage.

After the vision, as well as the dedication, Asher's soul appeared to be pulling away from his body, back towards the Labyrinth. As with Agnetha's soul, this problem did not seem to be amenable to Exorcism, as the problem was not one of an injury to the soul but of unwanted or unexpected behaviour by the soul, that if left untreated would most likely get worse.

Treatments for injuries to the soul so far have been either Exorcism (to remove issues) or Anointing (to allow the soul, strengthened by a particular Virtue, to overcome the injury itself). However, given my understanding of the issues with

Agnetha's and Asher's souls from looking at them with the rite of Insight, it did not appear that either of them would be amenable to fixing with either of these rites.

The rite of Excommunication, however, has the following effects when it is used on someone:

- * It prevents them from performing any liao ceremonies.

- * Like many liao ceremonies, it can be performed with more priests to increase the strength.

- * It is visible to the rite of Insight as present on someone's soul, much like Dedication or Anointing or Testimony would be.

- * Like other liao ceremonies that are visible to the rite of Insight, it can be removed from someone's soul by an Exorcism of equal strength. (This was done to Xavier of Celestial Cascade several times before his death - he was under a Writ of Excommunication, and so while performing the rite of Excommunication on him was not illegal, neither was exorcising said rite's effects so that Xavier could perform his own duties as an exorcist on the battlefield, as was the case when he died.)

With these effects in mind, I theorised that for Asher, a strong

Excommunication (of the strength of 7 priests, as has been common for recent injuries to the soul as a result of visions) would be enough to override whatever force was pulling Asher's soul away from his body and remove its hold on him.

An Exorcism of the same strength would then be able to remove the Excommunication and leave his soul as it was before (although without his Dedication).

An Excommunication on Asher's soul appeared to stop the effects of his injury, and the following Exorcism did indeed clear both the Excommunication and the injury away.

The same steps also dealt with the shadow over Agnetha's soul. The Excommunication made the shadow more solid, and the following Exorcism removed the shadow along with the Excommunication.

Both were then rededicated to their original virtues; Asher by the Gatekeeper of

Courage (Cyrus Cascade) and Agnetha by a group of seven Wisdom priests led by Ed Watcher.

Further research into the events of Agnetha's vision has given more information about the box that the herald's heart was placed in. It can only be opened by Blagovesta Radunova, almost certainly the name of the past life the visionary experienced (and the Varushkan egegoré has confirmed that this was a Varushkan). The effect is likely to be an illum-enhanced casting of the Night ritual Secrets For The Shadow Courier: the box does bear an enchantment, but cannot be bonded to. This is in itself interesting information, as it indicates that a person's incarnations seem to be treated separately by this Night ritual.

The box as recently located contains a desiccated heart, seemingly stuck to the inside of the box with dried blood. Like the box, the heart is magical, but it can be bonded to. The effect of holding the heart, or of being bonded to it (even when not holding it), is an impulse to passionately speak one's mind.

Further investigation into the box and its contents are still ongoing; if you are interested in this, please talk to Agnetha.

Summer Solstice, 378 YE

Introduction

Four visionaries experienced visions induced by Pure Liao at the Solstice. Of these, two were selected by the Council of Gatekeepers, one was selected by the winner of the Virtuous Auction at the Winter Solstice 377 YE and one was selected by the winner of the Virtuous Auction at the Spring Equinox 378 YE.

Following their visions, the visionaries and their accompanying guides were questioned by the authors. Their stories are recorded in the following pages, in the order that the visions were received.

* Anwar i Covas i Erigo (Brass Coast), accompanied by Ramiro i Sortero i Riqueza (Brass Coast)

* Pete Keeper of King's Stoke (Marches), accompanied by Harald Johnson of King's Stoke (Marches)

* Ricardo Almiada Desmondo di Tassato (League), accompanied by Ynez di Caricomare (League)

* Grigory Mandel of the Shattered Tower (Highguard), accompanied by Saboath of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)

Anwar i Covas i Erigo (Brass Coast)
Accompanied by Ramiro i Sortero i Riqueza (Brass Coast)

Anwar was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The account was presented separately by the visionary and his guide.

When the visionary came to, they were in a Wintermark hall. There was a table with nine people seated at it. The person at the head of the table was addressed as a king by the others, who appeared to be his advisors. There were another three people not at the table, who appeared to be bodyguards and did not speak.

Behind the king was a banner. At the top were three crystalline tears; below them were three figures; below the figures were three interlocked rings.

From conversation with the king and his advisors, it emerged that the visionary was a Highborn diplomat sent from the fledgling Empire. The king and his advisors asked the visionary to explain why they should join the Empire, and asked if their culture and their religion would be taken from them if they were to join.

They spoke of their religious beliefs: when they died, their souls would be carried away by birds, with better souls being carried by better, stronger birds that would return them more quickly. They also venerated three figures: the Hunter, the Warrior and the Mystic. (The king mentioned at this point that they did not worship them as gods: "we haven't worshipped any gods in Wintermark for a long time.") These figures were those represented on the banner behind the king, and each had a tradition associated with them; the king followed the Mystic tradition.

The visionary asked who the figures were, and the king explained that they were not gods, but heroes from the past. The visionary suggested that they could be Paragons or Exemplars and in discussion talked of the virtues that they might demonstrate aspects of (the Hunter was wise, vigilant and courageous; the

warrior was courageous and loyal; the Mystic was wise and ambitious) but did not suggest particular Paragons or Exemplars they might be.

The king and his advisors also mentioned a fourth figure in hushed tones, one that they did not give a name to, but to whom they took people when someone had done something so bad that they should not be reborn. In that case, a curse would be put on them and the birds would not take them.

The visionary mentioned excommunication to them, explaining it as a "severing of the soul". The king and advisors said that what they did was a curse that could be undone, and the visionary clarified their explanation to agree with that (as excommunication can also be undone by exorcism).

After this discussion of religion, the visionary told them that it seemed that Wintermark were already following the Way in their traditions, just not understanding it in the same way the Empire did, and that Wintermark could help the Empire learn more about the Way.

The king asked about the other nations of the Empire, and the visionary mentioned the Marches, the Brass Coast and Navarr among others. The king knew of the marches and Wintermark had good relations with them; he also knew and respected Navarr. There was a discussion of recent events at the Bay of Catazar, and the visionary mentioned that Urizen had joined the Empire (which is unlikely, as from historical records they were the last nation to join the Empire and did so during the reign of Emperor Giovanni), but the king was not familiar with that nation.

Discussion turned to what would happen to Wintermark if they joined the Empire and were under attack by barbarians - would other nations defend them? At that point they were under attack by the Jorun. The visionary said that as part of the Empire, other nations would help defend them against barbarians, as they would help others - mentioned that "we are loyal to our own".

The king and advisors asked who would lead their armies, and the visionary explained that they would choose their own generals. When they asked how generals could be removed, the visionary also mentioned the synod and

explained that their mystics would have the choice.

There were concerns about cultural dilution, and the visionary explained egregores to them; this included a mention of the Brass Coast egregore being three people, and a suggestion that the Wintermark egregores could also represent their own three traditional figures in a similar way.

In conversation the king said that he trusted the current Empress implicitly, but that his concern was with who came next. The visionary explained senators, and said that Wintermark would have their own senators, and that the king could even be one of them and still be the king of Wintermark. The king said that if they joined the Empire he would be the last king; his advisors said that this was folly, but he said that it might be a fitting legacy.

At last, the king asked his advisors in turn how they felt about joining the Empire. Three of them on his right voted yes. One on his left, who had been strongly opposed on religious grounds, remained opposed until the end. The fourth on his right wanted to learn more about egregores before giving an opinion, and the visionary offered to let him come back to meet the egregores and learn more about their magic. At this point, the vision faded.

The king of Wintermark in this vision was most likely King Atof Bearing, one of the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of the First Empress's vision of the Empire.

Anwar had his soul examined with the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision, his soul held a dedication to Wisdom and a testimony of "Virtuous Saviour", both with the strength of a single priest.

After the vision, his soul had a testimony of "Virtue's Disciple" with the strength of seven priests behind it, but neither his previous testimony nor his previous dedication to Wisdom.

Placement of testimonies on souls as a result of visions is something that has been seen on several previous occasions. However, none of the previous instances of this have removed previous testimonies - both Danarits at the

Winter 376 YE summit and Linden at the Autumn 377 YE summit had existing testimonies that remained visible after their visions, as well as testimonies added as a result of the vision. Likewise, no previous instances have removed a visionary's dedication. The cause of this is unclear, and further observation will be needed.

Pete Keeper of King's Stoke (Marches)

Accompanied by Harald Johnson of King's Stoke (Marches)

Pete was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The account was presented by the visionary, with some help from his guide.

When the visionary came to, they were inside a wicker man. There were two people outside the wicker man nearby, pacing around and shouting to it.

They identified the visionary as Thomas Overton, the senator for Mourmold. One of them was Edward Archer, the general of The Drakes, the first Marcher army. The other person was a friar, who told the visionary it was their fault the Mourm had been lost.

(The visionary found out their identities by asking the general to give a final report, which included the general's name, and by asking the friar to say one last time who it was had condemned them.)

The general said that it was his burden to bear, and that he should be in the wicker man, as it was his command that led to the loss. The friar said that Overton had failed because he had not obtained enough support in the Senate.

The visionary told the general that it was the visionary's burden to bear, and that the general still needed to command the army. The general fell to his knees at this point, and the visionary told him that they shrived his sins, and that if the visionary wasn't in the wicker man willingly then they wouldn't be there at all.

The vision ended, and when the visionary came to he felt refreshed and invigorated, as if he had woken up on a good day. He also felt that Mourmold was more important to him than before.

The guide climbed out of a small hole in the side of the wicker man, and while the visionary was talking the guide looked around the area outside. There were shattered rocks in front of the wicker man, possibly from an archway. Three ears of corn were planted in the ground, with one lying on the ground nearby, and there was a plain table behind the general and friar with an overturned basket of apples next to it.

Pete had his soul examined by the rite of Insight before and after the vision.

Both before and after, his soul was dedicated to Prosperity, but afterwards it also had a strong visible indication of recent contact with the Labyrinth. (This is not usually apparent on visionaries after their visions.)

Harald also had his soul examined before and after the vision. Before the vision he had no marks on his soul (he was a priest of the Way rather than of a specific virtue).

After the vision his soul had a dedication to Loyalty with the strength of seven priests behind it, and two intermingled injuries clouding his soul. One caused him to be paranoid that others were going to steal things from him such as his weapons, and the other caused him to be uncertain about his own knowledge and conclusions but aggressive when others did not supply him with answers.

The injuries to his soul were removed by exorcisms (two of them, each with seven priests participating). At Harald's request, the dedication to Loyalty was also exorcised.

This is the first case we have observed in our interviews of a guide, rather than a visionary, acquiring a spontaneous dedication. Harald mentioned parts of the ceremony before the vision that might explain the dedication's source.

When the civil servants performing the ceremony asked him what his dedication was, he said it was to the Way, but when asked what path he would

walk through the Labyrinth he said Loyalty, and he swore by Loyalty, the Marches and the Empire when asked to swear by path and nation later.

Given that guides are observers in the visions themselves and the visions are not related to their past, it is therefore likely that Harald's dedication came about as a result of the ceremony surrounding the vision (that is, it had the effect of dedicating him, as well as preparing him and Pete for the vision).

The strength of the spontaneous dedication implies that the magnified dedications and other spiritual effects on visionaries may be seen at the strength of seven priests (or a multiple/power of seven, as with Cora Holdfast at the Winter 377 YE summit) because of the ceremony itself. Might a different form of ceremony have different effects?

Returning to the vision itself, the Marcher territory of Mourmwood was lost to the Jotun in 349YE, 29 years ago. Thomas Overton is known to have been the last senator for Mourmwood, an the last Marcher to voluntarily enter the wicker man.

The Marcher tradition of the wicker man is the construction of a large figure made of wood and wicker, filling it with sacrifices and then setting it alight to burn them. The sacrifices are usually things raised from the land by mortal hands, such as domesticated animals or crops, but the sacrifice of one's own life is also possible; this is reserved for when one's failure cannot otherwise be redeemed, such as the loss of an Imperial territory. The Marcher belief is that a person's voluntary sacrifice of their own life absolves not just their failure, but the failures of everyone who served under them.

According to his guide, Pete Keeper's birth was shortly after the fall of Mourmwood, so his soul cannot have spent more than a few years at most in the Labyrinth before being reborn. It seems from this that the tradition of the wicker man, when carried out according to Marcher traditions, may indeed aid the soul's passage through the Labyrinth.

Ricardo Almiada Desmondo di Tassato (League)
Accompanied by Ynez di Caricomare (League)

Ricardo was selected by the winner of the Virtuous Auction of the Winter Solstice 377 YE.

This account was presented by the visionary with help from his guide.

The visionary came to in a small boat that they were rowing through Wintermark marshland, with rocks and weeds to one side of them. (This was likely the Kallavesa swamp, where the heroes of Wintermark are laid to rest.)

In the boat with them were an old woman with feathers in her hair sitting opposite them, a body wrapped in a shroud in the boat alongside the two, and behind the visionary a shield, a small net and a bundle.

The old woman addressed the visionary as Cimson and talked about why they had come out here - they had rowed out to conduct a funeral ceremony and return the body to the water. She referred to the man in the shroud as Drumlin, who had brought together seven pilgrims. One of the other pilgrims mentioned was Leta the Hawk, and it was mentioned that the pilgrims had fought the Vallorn.

From conversation, the old woman had known Drumlin for her adult life, and the visionary had been with both of them for a while.

They talked about the funeral ceremony. The old ways of Wintermark required grave goods be put in the marsh with the body, and the shield was all they had that was appropriate. The visionary asked why they should not put the shield in as grave goods, and the old woman said that on Drumlin's death the shield had spontaneously gained an aura. She was part of the first generation in Wintermark who had followed the Way, and said that it did not come as naturally to her as it did to the visionary (who was apparently younger). She was not sure whether to put the shield into the marsh as grave goods or not, and wanted the visionary's advice. At this point she took hold of the visionary's hand.

The guide pointed out that spontaneous generation of auras was a miracle, one of the signs of the Paragon. The visionary then spoke of reasons to keep the shield or put it into the marsh in terms of the Virtues, speaking of loyalty (loyalty to the traditions saying to cast it into the marsh, but also using the evidence of the shield to show Drumlin's loyalty) and of courage (courage to hold convictions but also the courage to change them when needed).

The shield itself was circular, with a design like an eight-spoked wheel, the spokes and wheel being a rope or chain design in black on white fabric. The old woman called it Oath-Heart.

The visionary was leaning towards taking the shield back rather than putting it in as grave goods, and let go of the woman's hand so he could examine the shield more closely. At this point the vision ended.

The pilgrims mentioned are very likely the legendary Seven Pilgrims who were active in the early years of the Empire; among them were Leia the Hawk, a Navarri pilgrim of Vigilance, and Drumlin the Sworn, a Wintermark pilgrim of Loyalty, who is said to have bound the Seven Pilgrims together with both words and magic. The Seven Pilgrims were said to have each carried a Pilgrim's Shield (a crafted shield that makes its wielder stronger as long as they are Dedicated or Anointed) hallowed to their own Virtue, and Oath-Heart is the name of the shield Drumlin is said to have carried.

The shields themselves were passed down to other people over the years, and this presumably included Oath-Heart. In the end, it is most likely that the visionary's past life did not consign the shield to the swamp, but brought it back to be used by future pilgrims of Loyalty.

-rigory Mandel of the Shattered Tower (Highguard),
Accompanied by Saboath of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)

Saboath was selected by the winner of the Virtuous Auction of the Spring Equinox 378 YE.

This account was presented by the visionary with help from his guide.

The visionary came to walking along a path through woods, with a sword in their right hand and several doses of liao in their left. Two people in soldiers' clothing of tunic and trousers met them on the path and greeted them.

The two people guided the visionary along the path to a shrine, which they could not easily approach due to the aura of fear that hung to it. There was the sound of shouting near the shrine from a band of orcs who were approaching.

One of the people with the visionary addressed them as lady Vashda or Vashit or Vashit (the visionary and guide heard the name differently, saying "Your light burns the brightest". The visionary stepped forward and started to exorcise the aura of fear around the shrine, while the other two fought against three or four orcs, who were wearing green and were possibly Druji. From the sounds nearby, it seemed that there were more orcs on the way. The vision ended while the two were still fighting off the attackers, and the visionary had used four doses of liao in the exorcism.

Grigory and Saboath had agreed to take part in a theological experiment that incorporated Abraxus's Guardian runes into the preparation for the ceremony; runes were painted on their foreheads by one of the civil servants before they were taken to the Gateway.

Both Grigory and Saboath had their souls examined by the rite of Insight before and after the vision. Before the vision they were both dedicated to Wisdom.

After the vision their souls had both been changed in the same way: all details had been polished or scoured away, and any attempt to focus on a detail of their souls caused it to slip out of focus. The effect of this on their behaviour was that

although they were aware generally of how people acted, they were not aware of who they were and not did they remember anyone they knew before, such as other members of their chapter.

Their dedications to Wisdom had also been removed.

For both Grigory and Saboath, an exorcism with the strength of seven priests was enough to heal the damage to their souls, and then testimonies asserting their identities (their names) restored their memories. Their accounts of the vision were taken at this point, around half an hour after they had come back from the vision.

For reference, the Abraxian Guardian runes used for Grigory and Saboath were as follows:

Visionary:



☸: Carul (the Swan, rune of Purity)

☶: Iremais (the Blade, rune of Wisdom)

☪: Iremais (representing the virtue of Wisdom that the visionary was dedicated to)

☪: Diras (the Shattered Lantern, rune of Secrets)

☪: Wyr (the Serpent, rune of Mystery)

Guide:



☶: Sular (the Ship, rune of Discovery)

☶: Eyrom (the Sapling, rune of Beginning)

☶: Iremais (representing the virtue of Wisdom that the guide was also dedicated to)

☪: Ophis (the Bright Lantern, rune of Revelation)

☶: Yoon (the Shears, rune of Ending)

The central runes should be changed depending on the dedication of the visionary and guide. Gralm is used for the undedicated, and the standard virtue-

to-rune correspondences are:

Ambition -> Naewe (the Fang, rune of Hunger)

Courage -> Jotra (the Swords, rune of Battle)

Loyalty -> Lann (the Hound, rune of Bargains)

Pride -> Feresh (the Eagle, rune of Majesty)

Prosperity -> Pallas (the Apple Tree, rune of Wealth)

Vigilance -> Ophis (rune of Revelation)

Wisdom -> Iremais (rune of Wisdom)

Aurum Equinox, 378 YE

Introduction

Four visionaries experienced visions induced by Pure Liao at the Solstice. Of these, one was selected by the winners of the Virtuous Auction, and three by the Council of Gatekeepers.

Following their visions, the visionaries and their accompanying guides were questioned by the authors. Their stories are recorded in the following pages, in the order that the visions were received.

- * Tanced de Rondell (Dawn), accompanied by Ozren of House Orzel (Dawn)
- * Luke of the Shattered Tower (Highguard), accompanied by Adoramus of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)
- * Vahne Korppi (Wintermark), accompanied by Uskollli (Wintermark)
- * Hywel Summercrow (Navarr), accompanied by Antonio Papageno di Sarvos of the Carra Noturna (League)

Tanced de Rondell (Dawn)
Accompanied by Ozren of House Orzel (Dawn)

Tanced was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary has not yet given his permission for the notes we took to be made public, and is waiting for further information from the Civil Service on the circumstances of his past life. If you wish to find out about his vision, please speak to Tanced.

Luke of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)
Accompanied by Adoramus of the Shattered Tower (Highguard)

Luke was selected by the winner of the Virtuous Auction.

The visionary has not yet given his permission for the notes we took to be made public, and is waiting for further information from the Civil Service on the circumstances of his past life. If you wish to find out about his vision, please speak to Luke.

Vahne Korppi (Wintermark)
Accompanied by Uskollli (Wintermark)

Vahne was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave her permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary with help from her guide.

The visionary came to in a bar, and was beckoned over to a table by a bald man with green and brown scales going back over his head. He whispered to her that she would need to deal with a mora (one of the shapeshifting monsters in Varushka), but that as long as she treated them as human, they would be trapped in that form.

They were interrupted by a Varushkan-looking man, apparently unlineaged, wearing a red hat with brown fur trim, and red clothing and furs. He greeted the visionary, calling them General Tarn - leading the Fist of the Mountain (one of Whitemark's armies) and serving Empress Maritka - and asked what gift the visionary had brought him.

The man with the hat took two glasses from behind the bar (a sign on the bar named it as "The Horned Lady"), and they sat down. The bald man sat down next to the visionary, but did not drink. Meanwhile, the man with the hat began to propose toasts, pouring out drinks for himself and the visionary each time.

Among many toasts, they toasted the Empress (the man asked how she was, and the visionary replied that she'd been fine when the visionary had left her), the Fist of the Mountain (with the implication that the visionary had come alone and not brought the army with them), and when asked to suggest a toast the visionary toasted to the Virtues, to which the man with the hat said he toasted to six or eight or how every many virtues the visionary had.

The bald man next to the visionary was pointing out other figures in the bar, who were sitting and holding drinks but not appearing to move, and indicating that more and more of them were more, becoming more twitchy and paranoid as he did so. When the visionary asked the man with the hat if the bald man was all right, he said, "He doesn't matter".

The man in the hat asked if the visionary had had a good trip through the forest. The bald man whispered to the visionary that that wasn't safe, and then the visionary and the man in the hat toasted to staying on the path.

They also talked of the new general of the Fists of the Mountain who would be replacing the visionary, and the man said that the army must be unhappy to not be led by a great hero. The visionary said there would always be an acclimatisation period but the army would warm to the new general. The man said, "How loyal of you", and they toasted to Loyalty.

After these and further toasts, the man eventually slumped on the table. The

visionary asked if anyone could see if he was all right, and the vision ended.

Vahn's soul was examined for any spiritual effects on it before and after her vision. Before the vision, her soul had a testimony of "Master Strategist".

After the vision, her soul bore the same testimony as before, but also had aftereffects of the many toasts that the visionary had drunk during the vision, leading to effects similar to those of a hangover. When the person performing the examination inspected these aftereffect on her soul, they too were affected with a similar spiritual hangover, despite not having been involved in the vision itself.

Hywel Summercrow (Navari)

Accompanied by Antonio Papageno di Sarvos of the Carra Norturna (League)

Hywel was selected as a visionary by the Council of Gatekeepers.

The visionary gave his permission for these notes to be made public. The testimony was presented by the visionary with help from his guide.

The visionary came to in a study with a writing desk, drapes, low cushions, small side tables with ornaments, and a spiral light feature.

The writing desk had candles on the left, and on the right were eight rolled scrolls tied with black ribbon; the visionary opened one to read it, but it was blank. Also on the writing desk were ten sheets of paper that looked like they had been cut out of a small notebook. The title page of these sheets read

"Doctrine of Imperial Destiny", and it was structured like an academic treatise with a proposition, several proofs and a conclusion. Both the visionary and the guide attempted to read it in full, but it was difficult to do so in the dim light and through the veil. The first proof mentioned tattoos and patterns as Navari hearth magic, the second proof was related to the Doctrine of Reincarnation and also once again to hearth magic, and the final page suggested that a change in Imperial doctrine would effect a change in the Labyrinth.

Two men burst into the room, both of them dressed like Highborn, one wearing deep blue and white with a hood and the other wearing white and carrying a sand timer.

They addressed the visionary as a priest from the Spire of the Celestial Cascade, gave their names as Isaac and Esau, and said they were from the Tribunal. They wanted to talk to the visionary about two things - the Tribunal itself, and the visionary's proposed doctrine - and they asked which the visionary wanted to talk about first.

The visionary said the Tribunal, and the Highborn man explained that the Tribunal was an organisation dedicated to protecting the purity of the Way, and had been set up at the request of the First Empress. The visionary asked by whose authority they operated, and the Highborn man explained that the Tribunal didn't have any legal authority at this time, but that they were unhappy with some of the changes that had been made to the Way (and, indeed, any changes to the Way since pre-Imperial Highguard).

They then discussed the visionary's new doctrine - the ability of Imperial hearth magic to change the Labyrinth. The Highborn said that the working looked right, but that the Synod was not ready for this, and asked, "Would you trust this in the hands of a League bishop?" They suggested that the best solution was for the visionary to not put the doctrine to the Synod, and asked the visionary to join the Tribunal.

The Highborn and the visionary were talking at cross purposes, and the Highborn in blue had to say "I'm threatening you" to make this clear. The visionary asked what they were being threatened with, and the Highborn said that the Tribunal were a law-abiding organisation and would not murder the visionary, but had access to all other legal methods and avenues. The visionary said they supposed the doctrine would go nowhere if it were taken to the Synod, and the Highborn in blue was not as confidently smug in his reply as the visionary expected; it seemed the doctrine might have a chance of being voted for. The visionary asked what they suggested doing instead, and the Highborn in blue said not to take it to the Synod as it was, but present a twisted version instead, to which the visionary said, "So, lie." There was a brief discussion of the

role of doctrine being perfect already versus seeking the truth.

While the man in blue had been talking to the visionary, the man in white was keeping track of time on the sand timer he carried, turning it once halfway through, and when it had run around halfway through the second time, saying "Three minutes" to the man in blue.

The man in blue asked the visionary again to join the Tribunal, and the visionary said no. The man said, "I thought you would say that, and did not come unprepared." He spread his arms and said, "I call down the power of the realm of Day to pronounce doom upon you, that you shall live in a grain of sand." The visionary braced against the writing desk, and the vision ended.

Hywel had his soul examined before and after the vision. Before the vision, Hywel had no effects visible on his soul.

After the vision, he seemed to be incapable of coherent conversation until he was given a Circle of Falling Snow, and described symptoms that sounded very similar to those of the Day curse All The World In A Grain Of Sand.

Examining his soul showed a bright miasma, briefly dazzling, that was causing this effect. An exorcism with the strength of 7 priests was sufficient to clear it, though it is possible it would have faded by the end of the summit.

Antonio also had his soul examined before and after the vision. Before the vision, Antonio was dedicated to Wisdom.

After the vision, Antonio was still dedicated to Wisdom, but was also weak and exhausted and complained of feeling very cold. This effect on his soul was, as with Hywel's, removed by an exorcism with the strength of 7 priests. An anointing of similar strength would also have bolstered his soul sufficiently to allow it to overcome the injury; similarly, as this was a case of the soul being weakened, drinking one of the Tonics of the Deep Forest to give him more strength would have reduced the strength of exorcism or anointing needed in proportion with the strength of the tonic.

Further investigation of the events of Hywel's vision in the archives of the Spire

of the Celestial Cascade gave a possible identification for the visionary's past life. Ulysses, a Questor with a particular interest regarding the Doctrines of the Way, was a member of Celestial Cascade who had been working on expanding on the doctrines; he apparently served as the Gatekeeper of Wisdom for a couple of years around 140 to 150 YE, and was reported as receiving a past life vision of his own, related to revising the Doctrine of Human Destiny in response to Recollectionists.

However, around 150 YE, he appeared to succumb to madness, and destroyed all his notes and works, deeming them "unfit for purpose". The symptoms described are consistent with the curse All The World In A Grain Of Sand; however, it is not known whether that ritual was in Imperial Lore at the time. Additionally, the duration of that curse as it currently is in Imperial Lore is only a year; it is possible that the curse at the time was a slightly different formulation, or that alternatively the destruction of his notes, or the curse itself, had lasting effects on Ulysses and his remaining work.