

Thank you for your letters, and apologies for not replying sooner. Things are rather fraught here at the moment, and sending a response to the Empire has been difficult for a variety of reasons. The priests are, of course, always wary about even sanctioned communications – after all, they fear that people might get up to all sorts of ungodly mischief, even dabbling in your Empire’s witchcraft. What nonsense such an idea is, of course.

On a completely different note, I am very happy to tell you that we have indeed been blessed with a child! This has made everything we strove for worthwhile.

To the matter of business, then. We are currently unable to release the service of any of our janissaries to the Empire. This is not due to a desire not to aid you, but because of events here in the blessed Confederacy itself. The bulk of our corps has already been leased out to one of the Dukes who has requested a degree of confidentiality as to the terms and task to which the soldiers have been contracted.

Our remaining troops are currently on duty patrolling and guarding elsewhere in the Confederacy. I am not sure how widely known this is in the Empire, but we are plagued by a cabal of rogue wizards, worshippers of the evil Dumon. These sorcerers terrorise the lands through curses and witchcraft, and have been far more active in recent seasons. As such, there has been greater demand for our services throughout the Ducal lands, as every noble wishes to protect their holdings against the Hand of Dumon and their servants. In the spirit of friendship, I must warn you that there is some fear these sorcerers are gaining support from the Empire, because not only do they wield dark curses, they also use drugs of the kind your priesthood partake of, in order to raise up enchantments and dark sacraments that drive people to hatred or seduce them into apathy.

On other trade, what do you have in mind? I must remind you that of course I am merely the proprietor of a business that deals in the contracting of janissaries, so I myself would have little to directly trade – but if there were interesting enough goods for trade, I could pass the matter up to the Duke of the House.

The topic of trade is a little fraught, however. It is my understanding that, over the past year, a group of the Ducal Houses sent an envoy to your Empire to try and negotiate the opening of the port of Robec, the supplying of wide-scale military assistance to the south-east of your Empire, and other matters, but that the Marquis in question is now in disgrace. This is because he was unable to secure a single deal with the Empire, which many of the Dukes have taken poorly, and has closed their minds to further trade. Some say they feel the Empire has insulted them, or that the Empire clearly intends war in the future because otherwise it would have eagerly sought the offered deals.

There is also consternation about rumours that there is another Dawnish ambassador chosen by your Empire. I have heard that some saw the election of the last one as a sign of military intent towards

the Suranni, that they would only choose a noble of your most notoriously warlike nation for such a diplomatic post if they meant to say they desired war, and now a second one is chosen after a period of few deals – apart from, I hear, a few separate arrangements with some of the Houses in Kalino, but that is to be expected, given their closeness to your border. So it seems that many are now wary of what the Empire intends to do next.

I hope that these fears are unfounded, and that we can work together in future again.

Elise de Courcey