

*Your Imperial Majesty,*

*It is my very great pleasure to congratulate you for sitting on a funny-shaped bit of wood that has been polished by important backsides for as long as I've been alive. Hopefully your other end will be suitably adorned shortly: I hope it doesn't fall off too often, and may your neck be nearly as strong as your spirit. I met Richilde once, you know: all I can say is, you have a lot to live up to.*

*I thank you for your Conclave's generous gift of friendship. I know it's nothing to do with you, but if history gives you all the blame for everything that happens then you should also get some undeserved credit occasionally. If there is not a small gift with this letter it is because Alcuin Shatterspire has stolen it.*

*I'm mostly writing to you about Tamarbode, in Reikos: by now you'll have heard that I took the liberty of moving in. You didn't seem to be using the place, and it was in a horrible state. I'd like permission to do it up, and to stay there as a kind of vassal: I'm after either signed permission or a handshake deal, and it has to be your hand or your sign. Of course you're not going to let me stay there for free: to that end, and because I'm curious, I'd like to talk to you or your representatives in Tamarbode an hour and a half before sundown on Saturday. Your Archmage should be checking the Gate for you.*

*The invitation is for you or your representative, your Archmage and his party, and I suppose you'll want to bring a Highborn representative and a guard or two; I suppose sensible interesting people would be out of the question. Your subjects have asked my patron for a few favours about the rotting corpse of Terunael: if I were you I'd come well-informed. Please don't bring any violence, and then you won't find any. I and mine are your guests in the Empire: I do know what the word Amity means.*

*It is heard that you plan to usher in a new age for the Empire. My great-uncle would say: if your body does what your mouth says, we approve. So much about your Empire is broken, Your Majesty. Don't just put it back how it was. Build the future. Prove that your Empire still has that vitality that nurtured me in its youth. Cast down the broken and the wrong and raise up new shoots to the light. Is this not Virtue?*

*Gilean, daughter of Gilead, grand-niece of Llofir*