

# True faith

*"What is the difference between our paragons and the gods the Asaveans worship?"*

*Amos started, surprised by the question from her old teacher. "Well the paragons are real for a start, their gods don't exist," he responded.*

*Noah smiled ruefully. "Maybe. But you don't know that. What if there really was a Balo the Bull? What then?"*

*He shrugged, unsure of what Noah was getting at. There might be a creator, but believing in a panoply of gods didn't make them real whatever the Plenum claimed.*

*"What makes paragons important, what makes them inspirational is their essential humanity." Noah opined. "What makes them important is the very fact that they weren't gods - that they were just people. People like me - people like you." Noah paused for a moment, but he was clearly warming to his subject.*

*"The paragons - and the exemplars - show us what we can do. They are inspiring not because they called down fire from the skies, or raised up mountains or struck down tyrants. They are inspiring because a human did this - and that proves you can do this."*

*"It doesn't matter if Balo the Bull is real or not because who cares what Balo does? You and I are not gods, we cannot do what gods do. But our paragons demonstrate that if you pursue the path of Virtue in this life, you will achieve extraordinary things. They did it - and they were mortals no different to you or I. The Way teaches us that the only difference between us and the paragons are the choices we make. That is why they are an inspiration to us."*

*"So are you saying it doesn't matter if Vardas is real?" Amos queried. He was pretty sure his former teacher had just argued the very opposite of that point.*

*"No - quite the opposite! It doesn't matter if Balu the Bull is real because they're not and never will be inspirational, regardless of the truth of their existence. But it matters if Vardas is real because what makes them inspirational is the very fact they were a real person - just like you or I. If they're just a story - then the things they did are not things you or I can do. There's nothing inspirational about that. They're just a child's story - one that can teach you lessons about Virtue, but it can never inspire you."*

*"This is the difference between Baddu the Builder and Isenbrad the Builder. The Asaveans worship their gods - their priests encourage you to bow down in obeissance to them. Our paragons inspire us to Virtue - we encourage each other to become paragons. If they did it - so can you."*

*"That is why it matters whether Vardas was real or not. That is why the paragons matter."*

## **Overview**

Following the recent summit, the Lepidean Librarian gave instructions for the library to publish in full their research on Vardas, the paragon of Vigilance. The decision was accompanied by statements of principle in the Vigilance Assembly, the Wisdom Assembly, and in the Varushkan Assembly. Taken together the statements seem to confirm the veracity of the extraordinary and controversial findings released by the Librarian - that Vardas was not a paragon, that in fact they never existed. Their entire existence was little more than a collection of stories, penned by a League mountebank.

According to the evidence published by the Library, the Imperial Synod were taken in by what may very well have been a deliberate confidence trick by a League fraudster. This news comes as a brutal shock to many - while some learned priests may have questioned the more miraculous stories attributed to Vardas, layfolk have always taken their existence and status as an inspirational figure to be a matter of historical fact.

People anticipated the Library's research might reveal that some details of Vardas' life were wrong - they understand that any account will always contain some inaccuracies. What they were not prepared for, was the revelation that every single detail of Vardas' life was nothing but fiction. This unwelcome revelation is a hammer blow to their faith. Imperial citizens, who often pride themselves on the idea that the Way is based on evidence, are reeling from the discovery that there are no reliable facts in Vardas' case.

The reality, that the Synod were taken in by these lies, has shattered people's confidence in their authority. If this is a lie, what else might also be untrue? There is a growing unrest, there are rumours that some people always knew that Vardas was a myth and kept the truth from people for fear it would be too destabilising. Across the Empire there is a growing crisis in faith, that will only grow worse if the Synod cannot deal with it quickly and decisively.

## **Do Not Demean Others**

*The Lepidean Librarian has commissioned research with our approval on the life of Vardas, following reports of a Past Life Vision that brings what we know into question. The Vigilance Assembly will seek out Falsehoods and expose the Truth; We are conducting an investigation into this matter will make the results public only when it is complete. Exemplars and*

*Paragons stand at the heart of our faith and we will chastise any fool that spreads hearsay against them, but we will not build our journey to Enlightenment on lies.*

*Irada Von Temeschwar, Vigilance Assembly, 386YE  
Summer Solstice, Upheld (252-0)*

*In testing received knowledge, the Vigilance Assembly and Lepidean Library learned that Vardas did not exist. Inspiration takes many forms, and we defer to the Vigilance Assembly on how to move forward there. However, an understanding of Paragons is key to the Way. As Vardas did not exist, we must reject and excise any teachings from the accounts of Vardas from our understanding of Paragonhood.*

*Solas of the Spire of the Waxing Sun, Wisdom Assembly,  
386YE Summer Solstice, Upheld (152-48)*

*The Varushkan Assembly recognises the vigilant actions of the wardens of Varushka previously attributed to the newly-recognised-as-fictional Paragon of Vigilance, Vardas. Look to their examples and remember that any of us can follow in their footsteps.*

*Lenochka, Varushkan Assembly, 386YE Summer Solstice,  
Upheld (204-0)*

- The Synod could use a mandate to tell the faithful that it doesn't matter if paragons and exemplars are real or not
- If this mandate gets a greater majority it will prevent a crisis of faith
- If the mandate is enacted then new memorials to the paragons and exemplars will not be inspirational and will not have significant additional effects

Some folk believe that it doesn't matter whether Vardas was real or not. They claim that Vardas life can still be inspiring, even if the story is ultimately just that. More importantly, these

biographies are teaching stories; they show people how to be Virtuous and demonstrate the benefits it brings to everyone. The Synod could endorse this idea; that it doesn't matter that Vardas is not real, because the purpose of the paragons is to teach people how to be virtuous.

This approach would curtail the burgeoning crisis but at a cost. Priests could still use the story Vardas to illustrate the importance of Virtue, but now that people know this is not a real figure it becomes infinitely harder to be inspired by them. Worse, the Synod would be saying it simply doesn't matter whether Vardas is real or not. People would inevitably wonder many other paragons might also be just stories? Was Korl a real person? Were the miracles of Isenbrad any more real than the miracles formerly attributed to Vardas? Few doubt that Empress Richilde was real, but can all those stories of Good Walder really be one person? That would fundamentally undermine the status of all the paragons and the exemplars. The idea that these were once real people whose deeds you could hope to emulate would be gone.

*The Virtuous face unwelcome truths. We send {named priest} with 100 liao to reassure everyone that Vardas' story still contains important lessons about Virtue. The Virtuous apply what they have learned.*

### **Synod Mandate, General Assembly**

If this mandate is raised, passes with a greater majority, and is successfully enacted, there will be no crisis of faith - people will accept that the real purpose of paragons and exemplars is to teach people how to live a Virtuous life, so it ultimately doesn't matter if they are real or not.

However, their ability to provide grand inspiration to Imperial pilgrims will be permanently lost. Henceforth, any inspirational

memorial - any site consecrated with true liao to the memory of a paragon or exemplar - would not have any additional effects. Existing memorials would not be affected, but it will be impossible to create a new memorial to the legacy of any paragon or exemplar that was genuinely inspiring. It will still be possible for the Synod to identify and consecrate sacred sites like the Kallavesa marshes or the Houndsgate in the Barrens, but memorials created for paragons and exemplars will hold less interest for the faithful.

If the mandate is raised and passes, but does not get a greater majority, then it would not affect Varushka or Urizen. That would be disastrous. Urizen has had a troubled history in recent times with an inspirational figure of their own and Vardas is a popular and much loved figure in Varushka. If the mandate is enacted but does not have the unanimous backing of the Imperial Synod then it will still irrevocably alter the status of paragons and exemplars, but it will not prevent a growing crisis of faith. If this happens, the civil service strongly recommend that the named priest chose not to enact the mandate they have been given by the Synod.

Even providing "proof" that a paragon or exemplar is real will not change this situation. The role of paragons and exemplars as truly inspirational figures in the Way as practiced by the Empire will be fundamentally changed by an acceptance that it does not matter if Vardas is "real" or not. There will likely be a number of other subtle changes to the Way as it is practiced in the Empire. Statements of principle that appeal to the inspiration of paragons and exemplars will be much less likely to move the hearts and souls of Imperial citizens, for example. While individual pilgrims might still hold a specific paragon or exemplar to be inspirational, there is likely to be much less interest in exploring the facts of their lives, or finding locations and items associated with their legacy.

# Test What You Learn

- The Synod could use a judgement of recognition with a greater majority to recognise that Vardas is not a paragon
- If this recognition is successful, and gets a greater majority, it will prevent a crisis of faith
- Doing so will provoke a demand for the Imperial Synod to address fundamental questions about paragons and exemplars

The judgement of recognition has been used in the past to remove someone's status as a paragon. The past life vision of Aldones di Sarvos, revealed by implication that the Synod had been wrong to recognise Atuman the Navigator as a paragon. To remove Vardas' status as a paragon requires a judgement of recognition - but to have legal standing it must receive a greater majority. Paragons can only be recognised with a greater majority anyway - but even exemplars enjoy this protection as established when Gilda Ashwine was stripped of her status as an exemplar during the reign of Empress Aenea. Thus it is possible, albeit difficult, for the Synod to correct the historical roster and remove Vardas from the list of known paragons.

If the General Assembly (and it must be the General Assembly) passes a judgement of recognition acknowledging that Vardas is not a paragon, there will be no crisis of faith - people will accept that the legendary hero is a myth, a carefully constructed story who once inspired people but in truth was never real. Those people who found Vardas particularly inspiring will be devastated by the truth, but the Way teaches the Virtuous to face unwelcome truths as boldly as any barbarian charge.

When the Synod changed the status of Atuman the Navigator, it was generally considered to a "correction". A imperfection that was improved on in the course of time as new evidence came to

light. People will not be as sanguine about the matter this time. By recognising that Vardas is not a paragon, the Synod will need to publicly accept that a brutal truth - one of the paragons of Vigilance that was recognised by the Imperial Synod for centuries was neither a paragon nor an exemplar - in fact they were not a real person at all.

Inevitably this will create doubt about the status of the other paragons and exemplars. If Vardas is not real, why should anyone believe the Marked are real? It will also cause people to question the nature of paragons and exemplars, to ask profound questions about how they are recognised and what their status means. There will be a clamour for the Imperial Synod to address these questions directly.

The Imperial Synod will face calls to examine the status of other iconic paragons. They will also be expected to consider the fundamental role that all these inspirational figures play in the Way. After-all what exactly is the difference between an exemplar and a paragon? Why do paragons need six of the signs of the paragon and exemplar but exemplars only four? One of the signs is a pilgrimage to Bastion, the heart of the Imperial Way. But many of the older paragons appear to predate the existence of Bastion - or indeed the Imperial Way. What is the evidence for Liberation? How can the Synod be confident that nobody will ever have a past life vision of someone they think is a paragon just because nobody ever has?

Revoking the recognition of Vardas will prevent a crisis of faith, but it will open up new questions - questions the Synod will be expected to answer.

## **What You Know Is True**

*In her role as Lepidean Librarian, Hazelelponi of the Shattered*



*Tower has discovered unwelcome truths about the exemplar Vardas. I call her to inquisition to speak on the virtue of her actions at the upcoming Autumn Equinox 386YE at a time convenient to both of us.*

*Masha Sigeling, Judgement of Inquisition, Courage Assembly, 386YE Summer Solstice, Upheld (Upheld (108-0))*

- The Vigilance Assembly has announced that it is conducting an investigation into this matter
- The Courage Assembly have called Hazelelponi to inquisition to speak on the virtue of her action
- The General Assembly could use a mandate to reject the claims about Vardas as lies perpetrated by enemies of the Empire

While the Lepidean Library is widely respected throughout the Empire, the decision to publish their work on Vardas was ultimately the decision of a single priest, Hazelelponi of the Shattered Tower. A significant number of citizens regard this decision with a healthy degree of cynicism. Wisdom teaches that "only fools accept hearsay as truth". What if the Lepidean Library has been corrupted by heretics? What if Hazelelponi is not acting in virtue? There is significant doubt about the veracity of this new work, some of which is reflected in the words of the Synod.

What are the Vigilance Assembly investigating? They have promised to investigate this matter and make the results public only when it is complete. One implication of the Assembly's judgement can be read as a defence of Vardas and a criticism of those who spread heresy against the exemplars and paragons. The Vigilance Assembly are not the only ones who appear to feel that there are questions which have yet to be

answered. Masha Sigeling of the Courage Assembly has called Hazelelponi to inquisition - it will presumably take place at the next summit.

If the Vigilance Assembly find sufficient evidence to believe that Vardas was in fact real and that the past life visions that seem to suggest that Vardas is a lie are the actual falsehoods then their investigation must conclude that the evidence published by the Lepidean Library is false. There are lies here, certainly, but they might not be the lies everyone has been assuming. If that happens then General Assembly could pass the following mandate:

*Despise that which threatens what you watch over, whether by malice, lies, folly or carelessness. We send {named priest} with 200 liao to reassure the Virtuous that Vardas is a real paragon and that these new tales are baseless lies. Cleave to what you know is true, even where others wish you to doubt.*

### **Synod Mandate, General Assembly**

If this mandate is enacted then the crisis of faith will end. The faith of the Empire will be bolstered by the knowledge that while someone has attempted to undermine the conviction of the faithful by spreading lies about Vardas, their lies have been exposed. The Way has many enemies, from the tyrants running the Iron Confederacy to the Freedom heretics sheltering with the Great Forest Orcs. Any one of them could be responsible for this attempt to damage faith in the Way - but the fact that they have been discovered and their deceptions revealed will mean that confidence in the Doctrines of the Faith, the paragons and the exemplars, and the Wisdom and Vigilance of the Imperial Synod will increase.

This approach is not without cost. If the General Assembly of the Imperial Synod denounces the work of the Lepidean Library

in this way, it will utterly destroy their reputation. The only possible conclusion is that those who work at the University are either heretics and blasphemers who seek to destroy the Way, or they are fools and halfwits who have been taken in by those who seek to do so. If the Synod denounces the Library it will have a devastating effect, causing the new University to be abandoned. The Library will collapse, there will be no dose of true liao each season, and the title of Lepidean Librarian will lose the power to commission any historical research on the lives of paragons or exemplars, or into the details of past life visions.

In addition it would create a significant risk for the Synod. If they were later forced to confront further new evidence that Vardas was just a story, then faith in the Wisdom and Vigilance of the Imperial Synod would be fundamentally shattered.

## **In Choice And Action**

- The longer the Synod waits to act, the worse the crisis will become
- No inspirational memorial created during this time will have any effect
- The consequences of inaction will grow worse the longer the Synod takes to address this matter

The revelations published by the Lepidean Library are causing Imperial citizens to openly question their faith. The Assembly of Vigilance has asked the faithful to give them time to conduct "an investigation into this matter" which they will only publish once it is concluded. They have promised people that they will respect the truth in this matter, but they will not rush to swift judgement. The Synod appears to be asking for time to consider this matter in detail. At present, few have acted on

their doubts - they have respected the words of the Vigilance Assembly and are waiting on the General Assembly to speak definitively on this matter. Irada's statement promising to fully investigate the matter has bought the Synod a little time.

That time will not last forever. "Virtue lies in choice and action" as the new Doctrine of Enlightenment points out. The longer the Synod waits to resolve this matter, the worse the crisis will become. At present the crisis only means that any inspirational memorials, consecrated with true liao to the memory of a paragon or exemplar will not have any additional effects. People will not flock to a new memorial while this cloud hangs over them. If the situation is not addressed by the end of the Autumn Equinox, then by Spring the situation will have further deteriorated. The civil service are monitoring this situation carefully - and will prepare a report on the matter each season it is not addressed, so that priests know what the stakes are for the coming season.

## **Crisis Ripples**

- The developing crisis has delayed the consecration of Capodomus Cathedral
- No new mandates or statements will encourage people to support the Grand Inspiration of the Way

The first ripples of the crisis are already underway. Last season a writ of consecration has presented by Estella Lucati of the Ambition Assembly, proposing to consecrate Capodomus Cathedral in Sarvos. With questions about the very nature of inspiration, it has proven impossible to prepare any guidance regarding the effects of a true liao consecration. The writ has been upheld, and will be enacted, but until the crisis of faith is resolved the civil service guidance - and the mandate supporting

consecration - will be delayed.

At the same time the purpose of the Grand Inspiration of the Way has been called into question, again due to uncertainty about the meaning of inspiration to pilgrims of the Way.

Currently Dawn and the League join Highguard in urging the people of their nation to support the building of the sacred city.

The effects of those mandates will resolve normally - the Dawnish and League contributions will be completed shortly before the Winter Solstice - but no new mandates will encourage anyone to support this symbol of the Imperial Way; Wintermark and Navarr won't be able to restate their support. Until the crisis of faith is resolved no statement of principle to support the Inspiration will result in a mandate.