

Thresher's summer

"Take a break," Robin called to her companion. She pointed in the direction of her husband who was coming back to the field with a pitcher and a basket. "Will's here with barms and watter for us all."

Marcus let the flail drop to his side and leaned back straightening his spine, making sure not to let the relief show on his face. They'd been working since break of dawn, swinging the heavy wooden flails over and over again. It was grueling even for a sentinel used to drilling five hours a day with the sword, and he wondered idly how some of his more bookish colleagues were getting on.

"Thas doin fine lad," his host flashed him a smile of encouragement. "You holding up alright?"

It was half a statement but with enough genuine concern to sound like a question. "The work is hard but I am fine, thank you," he responded politely, ignoring the burning pains coursing through both arms. It was a pain he hadn't felt in a long time, not since he was an apprentice spending his first weeks practising with a real sword. He was absolutely determined not to let it show though. His training might not have prepared him for this, but it had at least taught him how to mask the discomfort he was feeling

"Well I'm bloody nackered!" grinned the farmer. "There's nowt worse than threshing. Ya ne'er really get used to it... Morning's are all reet, I reckon, but by nightfall yall feel like ya arms are up to ya elbows in red hot coals. Then ya'll know about it."

Marcus nodded politely. "It is very arduous," he admitted. "Have you ever considered using ritual magic to help?"

"Course we bloody have!" laughed Robin. "Tharrit be

wonderful wunnit? Take all tha hard work owt of it. A few 'keepers have treed over the years, burrit never works. They kent get the emby rayshow up high enough."

"The emby ratio?" queried Marcus.

"Mana to bushel rayshow." explained Robin. "Now don't get me wrong, there's a place for magic in modern farming, course there is. Burrit's all about gerrin tha most outta ground. See a good thresher can do ten bushels of wheat in a day. The three of us," she said, pointing at her guest and her husband, "I'll be reet chuffed if we hit twenty-five bushels by nightfall. But we need to press on, we've damn near a thousand bushels of wheat to thresh 'for winter. Now, you can do it with magic, course you can, but there int enuff mana in Upworld to thresh that much wheat. And we're just one farm. There's a dozen farms between us and Stockland, all just as big as our place."

She paused for breath for a moment. "Turns out, far and away the most efficient way to use magic, is to boost the yield. That's how you get the best rayshow. A drop of magic in Spring, that'll mek the plants 'ealthy and 'ardy, across the whole farm. Double that for Summer, and you see every seed shooting up. Then in Autumn you cover every field with magic, hit the crop as it ripens, and yall have every stem fat and full. Done right, and ya have a bumper harvest year in, year out. That's how ta get the most bushels for every crystal spread on the farm."

"All of which means more bushels of wheat to thresh..." said Marcus.

"Now ya gettin it!" grinned his host. "The reward for a good job is more work... But that's how we feed an Empire." She handed her guest a hot bread roll from the basket. "Here - have a barm - it's fresh from t'oven."

Overview

Determined to bury the hatchet and finally end the rumbling conflict between their nations, the Marcher and Urizen national assemblies have urged people to travel to the lands of their opposite numbers, to get to know them better. Urizen has asked magicians, sentinels and sword scholars to help the Marches bring their harvest home, while the Marches have asked their friars to share some their understanding of virtue with the people of the spires.

Inspired by the words of Clytemnestra of the House of the Wanderer, hundreds of mages, sentinels and scholars make the long trip from the mountains of Urizen to the farmlands of the Marches. They fan out across Upwold and Mitwold for the most part. A few travel as far as Bregasland, and some to Mournwold, but the latter are forced to retreat in the face of the Jotun invasion. Everywhere they go, they make the same offer; to help the Marchers bring their harvest home.

Acting on similar impulses, Jedediah Boon has encouraged friars and monks across the Marches to undertake an expedition to Urizen. The hope is that where the two nations "have disagreed in magic we will unite in faith two schools of virtue together in one cause.". It is a noble ambition, to focus on what the two nations have in common, in the hope that that will bridge the divide between them and heal the rift.

The Marcher Harvest

Strive, toil and claim the just rewards of your labours. We send Clytemnestra with 75 liao to urge mages, sentinels and sword scholars to help bring the Marcher harvest home. All that is worthwhile is shared with those who deserve it.

Clytemnestra, Urizen Assembly, 386YE Summer Solstice,

Upheld (Greater Majority (358-0))

We've all had "that student" who thinks we can just mix the realms and harness the energy that results (or some other shortcut to power) and have seen what happens when they try it before actually listening to what we are trying to teach them. Remember, when visiting the Marchers, that their arete in farming is more developed than our own. If they're not doing something, there is probably a good reason why not. Do not change anything without running it by the steward. Engage with hard work first, rather than proposing alternatives to it. New ideas can be explored afterwards, but a harvest is a culmination of a year (or more) of someone else's work. Let's get it in.

*Eurybia of the Wanderers, Urizen Assembly, 386YE
Summer Solstice, Upheld (Greater Majority (322-0))*

- Hundreds of Urizen mages, sentinels and scholars have travelled to the Marches to help bring in the harvest
- Their willing efforts have helped to bridge the rift between Urizen and the Marches

When the first Urizeni visitors reach the Marches they are initially greeted with skepticism. There is plenty of work to be done, that much can't be denied. The run up to the Autumn equinox is one of the busiest times of the year in the Marches. People work from sun up til sundown to get the harvest ready before the winter. Every hand is needed to get the job done, there isn't a soul to spare, so the offer of aid should be invaluable.

The problem is the nature of the work. Threshing is a good example of that. Once the crop is cut, it has to be threshed to separate the grain from the crop stalk. In the Marches this is traditionally done with a grain flail, two heavy wooden sticks

joined with a short metal chain. The principle is incredibly simple, you just swing the flail over and over again, striking at the crop repeatedly until the grain comes away from the straw.

It's not the most skilled work, but it's arduous in the extreme. In Autumn in the Marchers, the sun comes up around six and doesn't set until gone eight. Put aside two hours for meals and that still leaves twelve solid hours of swinging a flail over and over again. It's the kind of gruelling physical labour that takes years to become accustomed to. The sentinels cope best; many of them are used to long periods of strenuous exercise. It is most challenging for those scholars and magicians who have spent most of their lives in study and practice of magic, rather than honing their bodies.

To their credit, though, many of the magicians do the best they can and once it becomes clear that the visitors are genuine in their desire to help, they receive a hearty welcome. If anything the fact that the visitors are prepared to stick with it even though many of them are obviously finding the work challenging actually endears them more to their hosts. A willing spirit with one hand is twice as good as a lazy one with two, or so the Marchers say.

As the season turns, the willing spirits of the new Urizen farm hands have won a grudging appreciation on the farms across the Marchers that have given them bed and board. It's made a small but meaningful difference to the Marchers, helping them to get the harvest in on time. Every farm is a little more profitable as a result, but the real profit has been a burgeoning respect between Marchers and Urizen. The Marcher folk are impressed with those prepared to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty working the fields, while many Urizen have had a first-hand lesson in just how much physical labour is needed to work a farm.

Sword and Shears

Landskeeper's Study

Commission Type: Ministry

Location: Oakwood, Ashbrook, Upwold

Cost: 12 white granite, 36 crowns in labour

Effect: Encourage the exchange of mana and magical learning between Urizen and the Marches

Keeper of the Study

Type: Marcher National

Appointment: Any

Powers: Can purchase mana

Responsibilities: To help spread knowledge of the magical arts used to enchant farms and to encourage the use of such rituals to help feed the Empire

Urizen Visitors

6 crowns	6 mana crystals
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13 crowns	12 mana crystals
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21 crowns	18 mana crystals
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30 crowns	24 mana crystals
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- The Marches could commission a ministry to help boost farm production

As the Autumn equinox approaches, the Urizen visitors gather up their belongings and begin the long journey home. The visit has helped to heal the rift between the two nations. While the focus has been on toiling to get the harvest in, there has inevitably been time for discussions between landskeepers and

the visiting magicians on ways to use magic to improve the yields on farms. A small number of architects find themselves fascinated by the arete of the Marcher yeomen, their mastery of farming and the way they are supported by their landskeepers, and are keen to explore the matter further.

Now that they have seen firsthand the panoply of rituals the Marcher farms employ, it is clear that little can be done to improve on that magic. Taken together, the magic of Blessing of New Spring, Strong Ox, Golden Sun and Gathering the Harvest represent the most effective way to enhance a farm. The law of scale means it would be possible to create a more powerful effect, but only by dramatically increasing the magnitude of the ritual.

The rituals are complex, requiring mastery of Spring, Summer and Autumn. Some landskeeper circles focus on just one of three rituals, some try to master them all. This is challenging because the best way to get the most from the rituals is to cast them on as many farms as possible in one ritual, but that requires significant skill, or access to potent foci or potions, especially for the high magnitude Autumn ritual. Many landskeepers have the rituals mastered, and find that the only limitation is how many mana crystals they can access.

The peaks of Urizen do not make for the most productive farmlands but the clear mountain air does appear to aid the creation of mana crystals. Tacitus, an architect from the Spire of the White Sun in Redoubt suggests that one way to create a lasting benefit for Marcher farms would be to find a way for landskeepers to buy Urizen mana. Tacitus has been staying with the monks of the Oakwood monastery who are short-handed working their land as some of their number have left to share Virtue with the priests of Urizen.

Tacitus and his fellow architects are keen to return to the Marches in the future, but mindful of the costs. He suggests that the Marchers consider creating a Landskeepers Study at Oakwood to help spread knowledge of the magical arts the Marchers use to enchant farms and to encourage the use of such rituals to help feed the Empire. Tacitus is clear that he thinks the position to oversee the Study should be appointed by Tally of the Votes, but he has enough experience of the corrupting influence of patronage to understand that if it happens then it's just as likely to end up being appointed by the Marcher senators.

If the study was established, then it would create a place for visiting Urizen architects to stay, where they could discuss farming magic with their peers in the Marches. The architects could finance their regular trips by bringing excess mana to sell at the Study - thus creating benefits for everyone - exactly the kind of arrangement architects like, and creating the kind of market that appeals to many landskeepers.

The Urizen Temples

The Prosperous are not selfish; all that is worthwhile is shared with those who deserve it. We send Jedediah Boon with 50 doses of liao to encourage friars to share their virtue with Urizen. Let us break new ground with Pride.

Grey Stone, Marcher Assembly, 386YE Summer Solstice, Upheld (Greater Majority (172-64))

- Scores of Marcher friars have travelled across the Empire to share their virtue with Urizen
- The subtle ways that friars guide their congregations have impressed the priests of Urizen

The friars and monks visiting Urizen receive a similar warm

welcome, but at first it seems the project is doomed to do more harm than good. Illuminates and questors in particular are eager to debate Virtue, the Way and the mysteries of the Labyrinth with their guests. Sword scholars are keen to challenge the newcomers to demonstrate their Wisdom, and many torchbearers are intrigued by the prospect of discussing the faith with people whose world is so very different to their own. But that reception quickly turns to bemusement in the face of Marcher heterodoxy.

The Urizeni are accustomed to outlandish ideas, but they are also a people accustomed to challenging every idea and many of them have precious little time for what they regard as childish superstition. The idea that people reincarnate as trees - or as rats or vermin - is seen as preposterous by many Urizeni priests. More than a few point out that nobody has ever had a past life vision of being a tree - or a rat for that matter. The evidence for this idea is completely non-existent they argue. When one friar responds that people in the Marches have held these beliefs for centuries, it brings a swift rebuttal. "Believing something doesn't make it true" is the response.

Fortunately the Urizeni commitment to poise is enough to ensure the discussions remain civil and eventually the subject turns to the idea of shricing. Somewhat to the visitor's surprise, this is met with much more enthusiastic discussion than the idea that people can be born again as rats. Many illuminates and questors are fascinated by the idea of shricing, talking about it with reference to some of the universal principles of hearth magic, illumination and assurance, cession, truth and most importantly of all witness.

There are debates long into the night about how shricing might work, how it might be tested and whether it ought to be possible

to develop a proper liao ceremony to perform it. Not everyone is convinced it is a good idea, some point to the implications for the soul's passage through Labyrinth and the core Highborn idea that both Virtue and Vice are effectively contagious. What if shriving the soul of someone who has committed dark deeds proscribed by the Way, just spreads the Vice of those actions further? But regardless of the benefits and risks involved, everyone takes the idea seriously.

In the end though, what impresses the priests of Urizen just as much is the friar tradition of living among the households and market towns they tend to. The simple, practical ways they have developed to exert gentle but far-reaching influence over the folk whose souls they guard speaks to anyone who has studied the Net of the Heavens. Nobody is persuaded by the idea that people can be reborn as fruit trees, but questors and illuminates alike are rapt by stories of Marcher priests giving personal counsel to individual congregants to nudge them back onto the path of Virtue.

By the time the Autumn Equinox is coming, these discussions of virtue have left both Marcher and Urizen priests feeling they have achieved something. The presence of so many Marcher priests across Urizen has swelled their congregations so every one is allocated more liao and votes by the civil service census, to reflect it. Sadly that does mean that spiritual matters in the Marches have been neglected, but that sacrifice is recognised and appreciated by their hosts.

A New Monastery

Monastery of the Four Winds
Commission Type: Sinecure
Location: Peregro, Morrow

Cost: 30 crowns in labour

Effect: Establish the new Arbiter of the Four Winds

Arbiter of the Four Winds

Type: Urizen National

Appointment: Urizen Assembly

Powers: Receives 12 doses of liao and 4 crowns

Responsibilities: To ensure the safety of the temple and its guests and facilitate the discussion of the Way, encouraging debate and inquiry of spiritual matters

- The Temple of the Four Winds could be dedicated to spreading Urizeni Wisdom to the four winds through inquiry, discussion and debate

The Temple of the Four Winds has a checkered history. It was sacked by the Druj before it could be completed, and was not restored until the orcs were driven out of Morrow the following year. For a while it was the seat of the Arbiter of the Four Winds, a respected position that was expected to liaise with the sword scholars, and present their philosophy at Anvil and to the Urizen people as a whole. The temple was largely abandoned when Urizen renounced Sulemaine, and the Imperial Senate abrogated the title at the Spring Equinox. Since then it has stood largely empty, while people considered what could be done with it.

Various ideas have been considered for repurposing the monastery. The original suggestion was that the Urizen Assembly could use a judgement to focus the Temple on arete, poise, or the Net of the Heavens. In the absence of any clear direction for the Temple, the empty chambers have proved

a boon for housing some of the Marcher visitors to Morrow, providing places for many of them to stay. While the layout of the Temple is very different to anything in the Marches, the main building is surrounded by beautiful gardens filled with fruit trees, which reminds many monks of the monasteries back home. A number of monks are keen to return in future seasons, the potential of the abandoned gardens to produce a steady supply of food has intrigued them almost as much as the rarefied discussions.

For the duration of their stay, the Temple becomes a thriving centre of activity with questors, illuminates, and sword scholars walking the cloisters and gardens together locked in earnest discussion of the Virtues and the Way. By the time the Marchers are ready to depart, the idea of permanently repurposing the Temple as a place for visitors to come to Urizen to discuss the Way has taken hold. The arbiter could be given the responsibility for spreading Urizeni Wisdom to the four winds by encouraging the exchange of ideas, through inquiry, discussion and debate.

It would not take much, the buildings are still intact and only minor alterations would be needed. The Imperial Senate could use a Senate motion to create a new Urizeni title, responsible for overseeing the structure, ensuring the safety of the guests and facilitating the discussion of the Way. It would require 30 crowns for the necessary changes, and should include specifications for how the title is to be appointed. Some of the illuminates suggest changing the name of the structure in the Senate motion to the Monastery of the Four Winds, in honour of the fascinating discussions with the visiting monks.

Whatever name is chosen for the title, it would receive a bounty of 12 doses of liao each season reflecting the transient congregation staying there, as well as an income of 4 crowns a

season from the monastery gardens which the Marcher monks are so keen to re-establish.

A Useful Synergy

- If the Landskeeper's Study is built and the Monastery of the Four Winds is re-established then they will both benefit

One useful benefit of these two ideas, the Landskeeper's Study and the Monastery of the Four Winds is the synergy that will come from taking all possible means to encourage the exchange of ideas between the Marches and Urizen. If the Landskeeper's Study is built and the Monastery of the Four Winds is re-established then each will gain an additional benefit for as long as both endure. The Study will provide one additional mana at each purchase level (7, 14, 21 and 28 respectively) and the Arbiter will see their income from the orchards and surrounding gardens double from 4 crowns to 1 throne. These additional benefits will be lost if either commission is inactive for any reason.

Participation

- Marcher and Urizen characters are encouraged to create stories related to this grand cultural exchange

A large number of Marchers and Urizen have visited each others' territories in the last three months. The majority of those going to the Marches from Urizen were mages, sentinels, and sword scholars but any Urizen character may have been inspired by the mandate to head west. Likewise, the majority of Marchers heading east were friars and monks, but there's no reason other Marchers might not have accompanied friends or family - not least to keep them safe in the wild places they must pass through to reach Urizen. At the same time, those who

spend the season in their own lands could easily have encountered visitors from the other side of the Empire - working alongside them on their farms, joining them for a meal after the hard work is done, or discussing magic on the one hand, speaking of virtue and religion on the other.

Players are encouraged to create stories of these encounters, using this wind of fortune as a guideline. Continuing the discussion of farm magic in the Marches, or of shriving in particular in Urizen, might be appropriate for some characters. Taking a glance over the archetype pages or the people or culture and custom pages for the other nations might also be appropriate, allowing your character to talk with confidence about first-hand encounters with people of other nations.

One key element is to remember that everyone involved has engaged in good faith. While there may be heated debates or arguments, nobody is taking advantage of anyone else or actively seeking out conflict. It's fine for a Marcher to still disdain an Urizen magician as an ivory-tower academic, for example, but it would be inappropriate to try and deny that those who visited the Marches did their best to actually lend a hand at bringing the harvest in. An Urizen might still roleplay a disregard for the importance of farms, but shouldn't deny that the friars and monks had at least as solid an understanding of virtue and the Way as their counterparts.