



To Empress Adélaïde de Val-d'Oise de Lesdiguières, first of her name, ruler of the prodigal land of Dun Sancerre

Please accept this small gift - a tribute based on our descriptions of you, created by one of our most talented woodprint carvers, and one of my own visage so that you might recognise me on the field of battle - or of diplomacy.

(Attached to the letter are two large "portraits", though they are half-way to being sculptures, using wood, obsidian and ivory contours rather than paint to give form to their subjects. The limbs of octopi curve around the frames, carved from black ivory.)





Your majesty.

I thank you for your kind gift, and I shall wield the blade with pride. Its name is Sorrowmere, for it will remind me of my grief should I ever have to raise it in anger between us.

Nonetheless, such an outcome is made increasingly likely by your words. In one letter you have accused us of waging war on the Quorum because of issues in communication, and in the very same letter you remove terms for an amicable peace due to unavoidable delays in a response that must circumnavigate the globe! We are not weak willed fools to be bullied by demands for haste, and though your bravery and wit is not in question in my heart, your negotiation style reminds me more of an impatient child throwing toys from its cot than that of a noble queen. But perhaps translation



has betrayed us both, for your original words must surely have been wiser – the midwife star shines brightly in the night sky, and our seers have declared it the Season of Dreams, so I shall heed the omens and be charitable in my interpretation of your words.

But there is wisdom in your words. It is unjust, as you say, to wage war on a nation that has not insulted you, and you have reminded me of this. I was in error. My mistake was thinking that you think of fondly of us as we do of you, for an insult to ones allies and friends must be answered as if it had been done unto ourselves. We withdraw our request for action against the Quorum, instead we would ask this: "that Dun Sancerre and Keitan pledge not to fight one another to aid one another in a future military venture against a mutually agreeable target." We are personally of the opinion that the Quorum will prove to you, as they have to us, that they are dishonourable and traffic with dark magics, and thus you will be as eager to constrain them as I. But, I will not ask you to guarantee this attitude, and I believe instead that together our might will ward off such dishonourable behaviour from any nation – perhaps instead we will find threats elsewhere that both our nations will benefit from addressing.

Indeed, in the time since our last letter, the Quorum have come to heel, and a bizzare form of communication has resumed, stemming from factions which operate independently of their government. Together with the honour-debt provided by the Rahastan, this has cooled our anger enough that we see no immediate need for action. It is curious – in Keitan, birds are loud, proud and raucous – yet the Quorum are surprisingly cowardly: perhaps their mutations in the laboratory that birthed them robbed them of spines.

It may also interest you to know that the rulers of Al'Daric have approached us in prior months asking for our warriors aid in maintaining their independence. Meanwhile, the Rahastan write to us that you armies endanger refugees and anger the spirits of the land.

With these points considered, I hope you can see that the friendship of Keitan would be beneficial. The council of Navigators is happy to agree to the following terms:

- Keitan aids Dun Sancerre in securing Tauhan as a Dun Sancerre protectorate
- Keitan troops will aid in dealing with monster problem in Tauhan
- A Keitan trading outpost will be maintained in Tauhan
- Keitan will receive a monthly portion of wealth or resources equal to half the output of the Tauhan territories
- Dun Sancerre and Keitan will enter a military alliance, and will aid each other in a future military venture (the precise nature of which will be determined).

Now, with those terms given, I can write of happier topics. I applaud your interest in military history, for the glory of our peoples is writ in blood and sacrifice and its study can only bring wisdom. I will endeavour to write of some of my own campaigns and battles, the trials through which our nation and mine own spirit was forged.

I note that you did not refer in your letters to the people of Grovel nor to the Republic of Verlan. Perhaps you will tell me of these nations? Is the republic one of your protectorates? We would learn of how life is under your rule, for people must flourish under the wisdom and strength of one such as you.

As to my own lands, Keitan is a people of patchworks, a vast firmament akin to the watchful skies that rest above our heads. Though I speak of the five peoples who weathered the age of chaos, they are divided into ten great tribes, and from there into thousands of lesser tribes. Historically, many of the human tribes that formed the Northern League grew numerous and powerful, for they controlled the bounty of the Fish Twin and were the first to bring the titans to heel. Since the time of my great-great-great grandfather, the Northern League grew under many wise and brave Mansas till it was opposed by the union of two great tribes of Lizardmen and Frogfolk, whose southern league held them at bay for a hundred years and one. The Lizardmen of the Blackscale tribe are cunning and hunters beyond peer, for the great beasts of the Bay of Scales are the most dread things that stride above the waves, whilst the frogfolks Court of Kings has an arrogance and pride matched only by their talent in war. It was only with my father's bravery, and that of mine own, that this deadlock was broken and the Keitan League became complete and unified, though the victories we won would have been hollow things if the elders and wisemen of each tribe had not decreed that the omens blessed the unification.

From your talk of these horse creatures your knights bestride, I suspect warfare in Dun Sancerre has its similarities to war in Keitan - upkeep and usage of beasts of war is paramount, and a campaign can be won as much through supply lines and groomsmanship than swordwork. And yet, your beasts are restricted to the fields and valleys, whilst warfare in Keitan is more often upon the waves than on the shore. I will thus relate a campaign of my youth which reached both fields of battle.

The War of Two Suns, as it came to be called, was the first great war of my youth in which I played an active role. I had served as a sailor on several ships prior to this, but those conflicts had been small things. Although the War did not end the Southern League, it cost them the support of many minor tribes, and represented the first emergence of a factor which would eventually spell their end as an independent polity. I must apologise in advance, however, that this tale features many of the Frogfolk, whose megalomaniacal arrogance makes them as annoying to rule as to fight.

The war began after a delegation of frogfolk hunters pursued a fell gheist far into the territory of a norther tribe, the Haluca. The frogfolk agreed to split the spoils of the hunt with the Haluca when the ghesit was corralled, but when this goal was achieved it was discovered the gheist had just whelped a large litter - a treasure amongst treasures, for although gheists are difficult to rear, they are mighty indeed. The frogfolk in charge of the expedition challenged the Haluca chief to an honour duel, which by tradition gave him the right to determine the location of the duel, whilst the chief chose the weaponry. The frogfolk selected a jungle clearing nearby, but when the Haluca arrived they discovered the honourless amphibians had fled into the jungle with their spoils. Honour was slighted, and the Haluca pursued.

Unfortunately, the frogfolk expedition was composed of many kings, emperors and grand dukes - minor nobility (I said they were annoying) able to afford Leaper Toads. These steeds, though not mighty in battle, move through the jungle with a speed and dexterity that none of the mounts of the Northern League could match. The Haluca pursuit turned into a bitter hit-and-run campaign, as the frogfolk slew dozens of sworn-men with poisoned blowdarts before fading into the jungle.

The Haluca were not without friends however, and called many nearby tribes to aid them, including my own great tribe, the Otollo. We starblessed have the blood of the sages in our veins, and it was my uncles wisdom that saw the frogfolk trapped in a peninsula by men from a half-dozen tribes, unable to retreat any further. But the frogfolk were not without guile, and before they became encircled they had already summoned aid from the Southern League. Three score catamarans and six turtle spawn Hulks, each captained by a lizardfolk headman or a frogfolk Grand-Supreme-Admiral (sigh), came north to the harrow peninsula, intent on rescuing their kinsmen.

Thus the stage was set for the Battle of the First Sun, where kith and kin died on both sides of the shore. For my part, I had only recently returned to my tribe after earning my adulthood by service bound to the cnidarian tribe - a relaxed people oft dismissed by the northern league, to our error. I had earned much honour in my sumpary service, and thus returned to my tribe with several prodigal cnidarinans and their ships, sworn to serve me in turn. The omens decreed that a swift strike upon the beach would be required lest disaster overtake us, and I volunteered myself to lead that thrust.

In the peninsula, the Haluca chief, Lyle'haluca led the forces encircling the frogfolk, whilst my uncle had embarked upon his own Hulk to prevent the Southern league flotilla from making beachfall and rescuing the trapped frogfolk. The battle commenced as dawn began to break, with our tribesmen advancing into the jungle and beginning to exchange boasts and javelins with the encircled frogfolk. Meanwhile our ships - of roughly equal size to that of our foes - moved to

drive off the flotilla. My own force of a hundred warriors were held in our catamarans off the beach, together with the cnidarians who had till recently been my hosts and teachers. Though in my youth I regretted not being able to swell my honour by joining the boasts and challenges on shore or sea, the omens had been clear, and I managed to keep my new subordinates from engaging.

In the jungle, the battle turned bloody as the frogfolk nobles took to their steeds and attempted to break out of the encirclement towards the beach. Lyle'halucas shamans unleashed spine hounds ahead into the forest, snapping beasts that could match the frogfolks speed but were sadly vulnerable to their poisoned darts and spears. The spine hound charge bought time, however, for well armoured and shielded men atop coral crabs to climb into the canopy at the jungles eaves. Where we could not match them with speed, we met them with a wall of carapace. Frogfolk were caught by set spears or torn limb from limb by pincers as they hurtled through the canopy, whilst their darts bounced harmlessly off thick shells.

Unfortunately, the battle on sea did not fare as well. Keitan sea battles often see our great turtle hulks pair off, their crews exchanging boasts and missile fire whilst the great beasts wrestle til the loser withdraws. So too do our smaller ships exchange fire and boarding actions. At first, this pattern held, and for almost an hour the Southern flotilla was prevented from approaching the beach. From my position by the beach, I thought the day would soon be won. And then, a sun appeared upon the ocean. Flames burst out amongst the engaged ships, and the screams and stench of burning men erupted from the centre of the battle. Upon a great ship of the southern fleet, there stood a great, eldritch creature. Four legged, with large tusks and a central tentacle, one of the famed elephants of the southern plains stood upon the prow, directing flames from its trunk upon our ships. Elephants stood on three other ships of the lizardmen, specially modified to hold such large creatures. The fire-ships broke through our lines, burning any who stood in our way, and soon made landfall on the beach.

From the jungle, the surviving frogfolk emerged - barely a tenth of their original number, but at their head rode the leader of the hunting expedition, Unr'avel, Senior-God-Emperor of the hunting expedition. It seemed then that we had failed, for the rescue could not be prevented when the southern leagues beasts could burn anything above the water.

I had not been idle, however. The cnidarians are oft dismissed by other tribes, as I have mentioned, for they are lazy and lethargic, preferring an easy life amongst the shallows in which they make their homes above and beneath the waves. They are, however, great swimmers, and I myself was no slouch. As the fire elephants had begun to break through our lines, I had led my men and my cnidarian allies into the waters, where the flames could not reach us, and as the elephant-bearing ships made landfall to collect the fleeing frogfolk, we swam up to the beached ships. Elephants

are easily enraged, if you know where to strike, and my forces boiled aboard the ships just as they began to set off, striking the beasts up close and sending them into a berserk fury. Their own flailing bulk did more damage than the flames they unleashed, and both claimed more southerners than our own blades. However it was I who faced Unr'avel aboard the deck of the collapsing ship that had rescued him, and it was my blade that severed his dishonorable head.

With the elephants destroying their own ships, the frogfolk were cut off and the southern armada had lost its leaders. Surrender came shortly after Unr'avel's death, but this battle was to be the first of many, for the southern tribes had invaded our waters and I was eager to answer. Of note in this battle was the fire that lit a sun upon the waves – the use of fire against ships was not unknown, but this was the first time it had been so deadly. Indeed in future years I would employ a similar tactic to finally bring the southern league to heel, but that is for another time.

Tell me, your majesty, how are your "horses" and "knights" employed in battle? We of Keitan have great interest in the fauna of the wider world, and would be interested in learning more of these horses. Perhaps you could send us a few such beasts, and grooms to teach us how to care for them, and in exchange we can send examples of our own wide menageries.

I look forward to your response

From his majesty Mansa Sino'otollo, the Shark-Binder, Voice of the Navigators, High King of the Three Fleets, Ruler of the Six Seas, Lord of the Nine Islands, Master of the Wreckage, Warden of Northern Tauhan, the Starblessed, Walker of the Elder Path, Councillor of the Cnidarians, Good Buddy, Binder of Men, Cleaner of Latrines, First Sword of the Surf, Brine-bound and Iron Willed.



*Mansa Sino'otollo*