



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

The Empress, by Mansa Sino'ottollo.

Empress Adelaide, so regal, bold and unafraid.
Only I know your real fear: growing old a maid.

For want of an empire, a husbands beyond reach.
So sit down, shut up, and listen to me preach.

You'll always be a princess, never quite a king.
No man will love you for you, only the empire you bring.

If my beasts were to bite, you'd pray they don't miss.
In your old age, it's the closest thing you'll get to a kiss.

But try as you might, a suitor you can't bewitch.
Sooner or later, they find out you're a true bitch.

But it's not for lack of effort, each man in town tries
In fact it's quite easy to get a hand between your thighs.



Getting out is the trick, they realise you're cursed
No thing on two legs can quite quench your thirst.

That's why if you get married, he'll soon want a divorce
After finding you're already well ridden by your horse.

I pray you don't conceive as part of the marriage.
Based on how you've ruled, you'll probably miscarry.

But enough about your unfortunate gender,
Let's talk about you as an incompetent defender

Of a nation divided, Dun Sancerre against Verlan.
I'd call you incompetent even if you were a man.

You paused a war when confronted with Bellor.
A coward's choice and the people ask, what for?

You say it's a truce, that's a lousy excuse.
You just misheard "shoot her" as suitor.

It's sad, dear, that you're that desperate.
Even off in Lesdiguières they smell-a-rat.

And Patrice-Joseph will never make you his bride.
Too bad, you need a real man to take you in stride.

Cos you're barely a soldier, less than half a knight.
I've seen halfings that put up more of a fight.

Not much of a general, the only wins you have are pyrrhic.
Get used to bitter tastes, turns out defeat is acidic.

Cos what else can we call a war half-waged except lost?
You're too scared of the wide world, too afraid of the cost.

And if you can't overcome one measly republican senator?
How're you gonna beat your real foe, the law of primogenitor?

And yet despite these countless defeats,
The draws, the sacrifices, the many retreats.

You've called up a crusade, that's brave.
How dare the other nations misbehave

ON YOUR DAMMED LAWN. Its really quite tragic.
It's a shame you'll lose, for you don't have magic.

Mages you lack, and no money to hire some.
Instead you made choices far more tiresome.

Your wardrobe for one, a fine "military aesthetic."
You think you look tough, you just look pathetic.

Grow up, Bitch Queen, and dress as your true part.
Wear your mother's outfits, you'll look like a tart.

I've heard you inherited your looks from that old sow.
A shame you inherited your political wit from a cow.

"We must unite instead of divide" you prattle.
You? Lead us? Please, you couldn't lead cattle.

Cease your rhetoric, I've heard more sense from a pigeon.
And that's not mentioning the mess that's your religion.

In your letters you extol the virtues of St. Astaluf.
I hope he's got patience with you, I've had enough.

Inside churches you and your people pray prostrate.
But outside you quake in fear of being named apostate.

But be still, my empress, don't shed a tear.
Dull as you are, you have nothing to fear.

You aren't a heretic, your honour is beyond repute.
Too boring for evil, too honourable to dispute.

And even if you fell to chaos, Empress, let's get real.
You couldn't sell your soul, the devil wants a good deal.

Because evil is classy, kings are the answer to its question.
Chaos doesn't waste time on the last in the line of succession.

Perhaps evil will come to somebody you chose.
One of your agents perhaps, I'd keep on your toes.

Because an emperors job is to inspire loyalty.
But the best you can do is sewing embroidery.

So if you manage to invade us, I'll raise a toast.
But for now just sit tight and listen to my roast.

I'm serious, come visit us in Keitan, lets give it a whirl.
Maybe my daughters can show how to fight like a girl.

Just stay ashore, on the ocean you'd have problem or two.
I think three rotten planks would sail better than you.

In a Gheist raid you'd quiver underneath their attacks.
Listlessly shaking, shield raised above your hand-axe.

More lumberjack than knight, waving your hatchet.
I hear there's a plague in town - I hope you catch it.

Guess you're too weak for a sword? your grip must be limp.
There's ways to train those hands girl, I'll recommend you a pimp.

Your excuse, I hear, is that swords are just for duelling.
Please - spare me - I can't stand more of your mewling.

For I hear your voice far more often than I can stand.
Letters upon letters filled with demand upon demand.

Till your voice rings in my dreams after the setting sun.
I see your foul hair, your cruel lips, I'm quite undone.

And you're still standing, bloodied but unbowed by fate.
The saints love an underdog, it's not up for debate.

Because now my insults must come to an end.
Dear Empress Adelaide, I name you my friend.

Dear Empress, now these traditional formalities are complete, I greet you with the full honour and friendship due from one great chieftain to another. The stars shine warmly on our friendship, and the Season of Dreams has begun, bringing with it a most favourable conjunction of The Midwife and the Golden Eye. Your letters, as ever, delight my mind and enchant my imagination, for your land is most strange to our own nation. Yet similarities there are, strange only from afar, and it gives me hope of our continued cooperation.

Your story is moving, and I wish you luck in earning the acclaim and loyalty of your people - you have already earned mine. My own subordinates burn with ambition, for all captains are as kings aboard their own ship, and such a life accustoms one to rule, not to be ruled. A dozen challengers have been bested by my taunts and blade, and they now serve me till I see fit that they have re-earned their position in our society. Send this Joseph-Patrice to trade with my folk, where I will seek him out and duel him for the dishonours he does to you.

I affirm our agreement. Perhaps we should set it down formally, in person, as a treaty? We should also clarify some details. Should we transfer the territory to your control once the area is completely secure, and begin taking receipt of our half-share at that future point, or some more imminent arrangement? For now, my captains will keep clearing the northern regions of monsters and protecting the refugees therein.

Indeed, I have written to my captains in Tauhan, instructing them to heed and aid your forces. My ships will be ready to conduct your knights to the Graulden-Hall isle and your Grand Admiral Giacomo Henri d'Harcourt, Dragonsbane will be met by Salt Chief Brio'otollo, salt chief, crow-killer, ratsbane, knife of the waves, the coral blade.

A word of caution: in the hierarchy of Keitan, Salt-chief is a rank only surpassed by my own. I have told her to cooperate with your Grand Admiral, but frankly she has a bellyful of pride and a position to match,

and I doubt she will show him deference. She may however heed his advice, for her tactical mistakes recently have displeased me and may have levelled her ego somewhat. Indeed, to prevent a repeat of that unfortunate confrontation with the Rahastan, I have given strict instructions that she not begin hostilities with other nations.

In the north of Tauhan, your knights will find five hundred ships of the Shark fleet, currently the largest and most warlike of our four fleets. They will find at its heart many mighty turtle-spawn ships, great beasts that have stories and honours far greater than mine own. Tactically, these serve as hubs from which faster ships powered by sail or oar can refuel, and moving fortresses and rams that can break lesser ships in twain with ease. A few other beasts are numbered amongst the ships, including Deep Squid and Flense Whales, and these provide more unique capabilities. Lesser ships, swift katamarans and fierce daos, make up the rest of the armada.

Your knights will likely also encounter the kith of the Crab and Squid fleets, older and calmer vessels which make up our trade and fishing fleets. These we have sent to bring food to the refugee camps we have established, though the Rahastan are now demanding we cede authority over all the Tauhan people to them - I am not sure if this also applies to those in your domains. The Tauhan preferred to live in their great city-ships, and though many are ruined I expect they will be able to construct similar craft once the monsters have been neutralised. My traders are skilled in traversing the waves, and though from the rumours your Gravesea is a particular challenge, with your permission I will tell them to make contact with your realm in future months.

Our Navigators are also in the area, and they have attempted to bind the deranged monsters the Tauhan have become so that they may be prevented from harming others, but so far have met with little success - I believe they were distracted by purging some local northern malady that threatened our expedition. We have thus focused our efforts on putting the beasts down at the point of a spear. Perhaps we can find another purpose for them for, although they do not match the skills of the spellcasters of Rahastan or Al Daric, they have some skill in manipulating the wilds of nature and seem to be our only hope to match the dishonourable lies and illusions practiced upon us by other realms.

Indeed, I have put some thought to how cooperation between our nations will translate to the battlefield. Keitan warfare seems to operate on a much smaller scale than your own, though the titanic creatures we bend to our wills make it seem otherwise. Their bones now form our homes, and my own capital, the great city of Our creatures are tough and mighty and our warriors swift and fierce, but it is not our way to seize ground and hold it, as seems to be a feature of your stories. It may be that your infantry are our Shield, your knights our straightforward Spear, and my own forces the arrows and curved blades that dance swift and deadly around the flanks. Other mentions of your warfare intrigue me. I am familiar with ballistae and catapults, but what are these canons of which you speak?

The other aspect in which we are lacking seems to be the ability to counter the deceptions, spies and illusory magics of other nations, which has cost us in prior engagements, though victory was still ultimately our own. Do you have experience in dealing with such threats?

If I might share my burdens with another ruler, I have two concerns when looking at the wider world. One, that nations that seem to value deception and manipulation will continue to infiltrate our land, lie to our allies, and subvert my own subjects. Second, that nations which value coin over honour will prosper unchecked, trading centrally with rich neighbours whilst my own nation withers on the far edges of the world. One solution to this issue is that my navies could offer protection to the trading fleets of other nations, for our skill at navigator and combating the monsters-of-the-deeps is unmatched.

The issue would arise, however, what to do if these rich nations were to say: No. Perhaps, even, they would go to another nation for security, maybe even your own. It occurs to me that this might not be a problem, and might even be an opportunity for both our nations to bring order to the wider world. Such an idea would work should we ensure our captains understand not to begin hostilities with one another.

As to the Republic of Verlan, I understand that you wish to resolve the issue by your own mettle. However, we wish our ally to be as strong as possible and we are happy to lend any aid you need now, or in two months time. Often I have brought tribes to my banner by making clear the danger of facing the monsters of the Keitan islands alone, and perhaps with our aid you might resolve this with minimal bloodshed..

I marvel at your stories of the death of titans and the numbers involved. We have slain our own fell titans - the Weeping Mother, the Angler, Earthshaker, and more, but our histories do not relate the numbers of men, women and beasts who perished in the efforts. Know that many of our islands were once one, their separate channels and lagoons carved in the death throws of dying leviathans. Indeed, my own palace within the capital of Akusun, the city of songs, is carved from the shell of some long forgotten beast. I wish that you could see it one day, for it is a beautiful place now, inlaid with the gold of my Empire and a fitting tribute to my glory.

Your gifts of the great horses is most gratifying. I will ensure my people learn how to upkeep and care for them. In turn, I will tell my traders to bring you a parrot from my own menagerie - it is a colourful but dim witted bird that can none-the-less repeat phrases as if it were a man!, though I assure you it does not understand them. Interacting with one should prepare you for talking with the Quorum.

As to your interests in our beasts, I attach a copy of "An Incomplete Bestiary of Keitan", a curious text written by a stranger to these lands that has been well received. I can elaborate somewhat on Gheists. They are mighty and are valued for their ability to take to the air, even with one or two men mounted on them (though their true danger is their deathly shriek and rending jaws). However, few tribes are wealthy enough to maintain one, for their diet is expensive - they are picky eaters and refuse to eat regular livestock. I have never seen more than one on a battlefield at a time, and their use is unlikely to ever be widespread unless constant war can be engineered to keep them fed. I would rather bind to myself a great King Shark, the mighty demi-titans that devour ships in a single bite. Only three have ever been bound in our history, and each man or woman to do so has achieved great things.

As to other beasts, a personal passion mine has been the breeding of Spine Hounds, and I have several particularly fine and loyal specimens within the latest crop. The trick, I have discovered, is to breed aggressive traits from the female side, not from the males in which these traits are most apparent. Something in the maternal blood must come through more true, for the offspring more consistently match the mothers temperament in these things.



From his majesty Mansa Sino'otollo, the Shark-Binder, Voice of the Navigators, High King of the Four Fleets, Ruler of the Six Seas, Lord of the Nine Islands, Master of the Wreckage, Plaguecleanser, 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