



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

Your majesty. Your letter has been a refreshing display of frankness. The other nations of Bellor seem to prefer lies or meekness to honest dealings. If we are to be foes, know that we esteem the manner in which you have approached us first and will try to respond with equal candour.

However, you have done us one insult. In Keitan, it is proper to hold a man accountable for the dishonourable actions of his ancestors. Perhaps the Heralds related this tradition to you incorrectly, for you seem strangely intent on holding my people accountable for the sins of *your* ancestors. If your forebears unleashed monstrosities upon their own people, then you have my sympathies, but not my apologies. My own father was slain by a man armed with a spear. Yet I have not banned spears from my land or declared blood-feud on the next man I saw carrying a stick. To do so is not to rule, it is to be ruled: by fear.

Fear once almost destroyed my own land. The five islands which I rule once numbered in the hundreds. Kith and kin of a dozen races sailed between the islands, which bore great bounty. Then the age of chaos came, and the land itself was rent asunder. Islands were cut off from one another, and fishermen starved ashore, too afraid to set sail for they no longer knew the safe routes between the corals or how to avoid the leviathan spawn that lurked beneath the waves. And so our people dwindled, darkness and monsters consuming each island as it stood alone until only five tribes remained.

Our great ancestor, Aloc'to, was the first to break free of this fear. He opened his ears to the jungle, and stared unafraid at the night which others thought too dark and full of terrors. In that night he heard the whisper of the winds, and in that dark sky he saw the stars, shining faintly above. And so he learned to read the waves and navigate by the position of the stars, and he managed to sail once more between the stricken islands, bringing stories and knowledge to each



fractured tribe. And when the Leviathans came to consume the boats with nets full of fish once more, Aloc'to called the fish and beasts of the islands to his aid. Great battle was waged, until Aloc'to died laying low the great monster known as the Angler. To imply he served the age of chaos is an insult. Do your own warriors not fight on horseback? Do your farmers not pull their plows with large, horned creatures? That our lands have beasts that are foreign to you should not make their use any less respectable. Unlike you, we did not have plentiful metal to armour our warriors or pliant horses for them to ride. My ancestors survived the age of chaos by binding creatures, and for that I honour them.

We are no friend to that age, as you accuse. We do not bind chaos. We bring order and honour. And we still revere our ancestors who found this path, much like you revere the ancestors who found that a lance was their salvation. It sounds like the binders who haunt your history chose not to embrace order or protect the people, but to do the opposite, and I see as little similarity between them and our own arts as I see between the spearman who killed my father and one of your horse-born lancers.

I am pleased that you have shared your recent history so openly, and I offer my belated sorrow for the death of the previous Emperor. I think if you look beyond our differences, you would see more similarities. The Keitan islands are five nations united between one banner by the age of chaos, bound by ties of honour and blood to serve the greater needs of our people. I myself brought the last errant tribes into the fold not ten years ago. Our highest virtues are to honour the ancestors and respect the authority and words of our betters, to be guided to higher things. As, it seems, are yours. Tell me more of the deeds of your family, and of your children and spouse, should you have them.

As to Tauhan. We know not what caused the cataclysm that consumed their land, but I can say truthfully that we had no part in it. They are a people of salt and sea similar to our own, and before the disaster struck our relations were most cordial. Indeed, I had promised the Twice Born Prince that my people would lend his aid should they need it.

My people have arrived in Tauhan to fulfil that promise. Can you truthfully say the same?

I will lay out my intent for that land quite openly. My forces have arrived escorting ships full of grain for refugees, and they are offering the tribes of the north the opportunity to seek our protection or that of Rahastan. Should they accept, they will be subject to our laws and traditions, as I suspect they would be should they seek your protection. I intend to establish a trading outpost in the North, so that my people might trade with Rahastan and your own. If you wish to avoid the tragedy that would result from trapping the remaining refugees between our warring armies, then I will happily leave the south of Tauhan to your protection should you leave the north to mine.

However, a desire for total dominion is not dishonourable. If you cannot content yourselves with half of Tauhan, then we will meet you blade for blade and consider you an honourable opponent. Perhaps we will meet on the field of battle, such that I might behold your fierce beauty for myself.

As a token of my appreciation, I have sent a fine hatchet, inlaid with whalebone and made by my own hand.

(A whalebone hatchet of some artistry comes with the letter. Lines of poetry in the Keitan script are inlaid into the handle, and the blade itself is composed of some strange variant of iron).

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, Warden of Northern Tauhan, the Starblessed, 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*