

Unto Dame Brionna of Stanway, Captain of the Royal Guard; Chief Military Advisor to the Archduke Alastair and member of the Privy Council.

From Clarence Strawberry, Director of Military Intelligence

In substance: A full report on the present geo-political circumstance in the Southern Territories and adjoining areas.

Greetings Honored Dame:

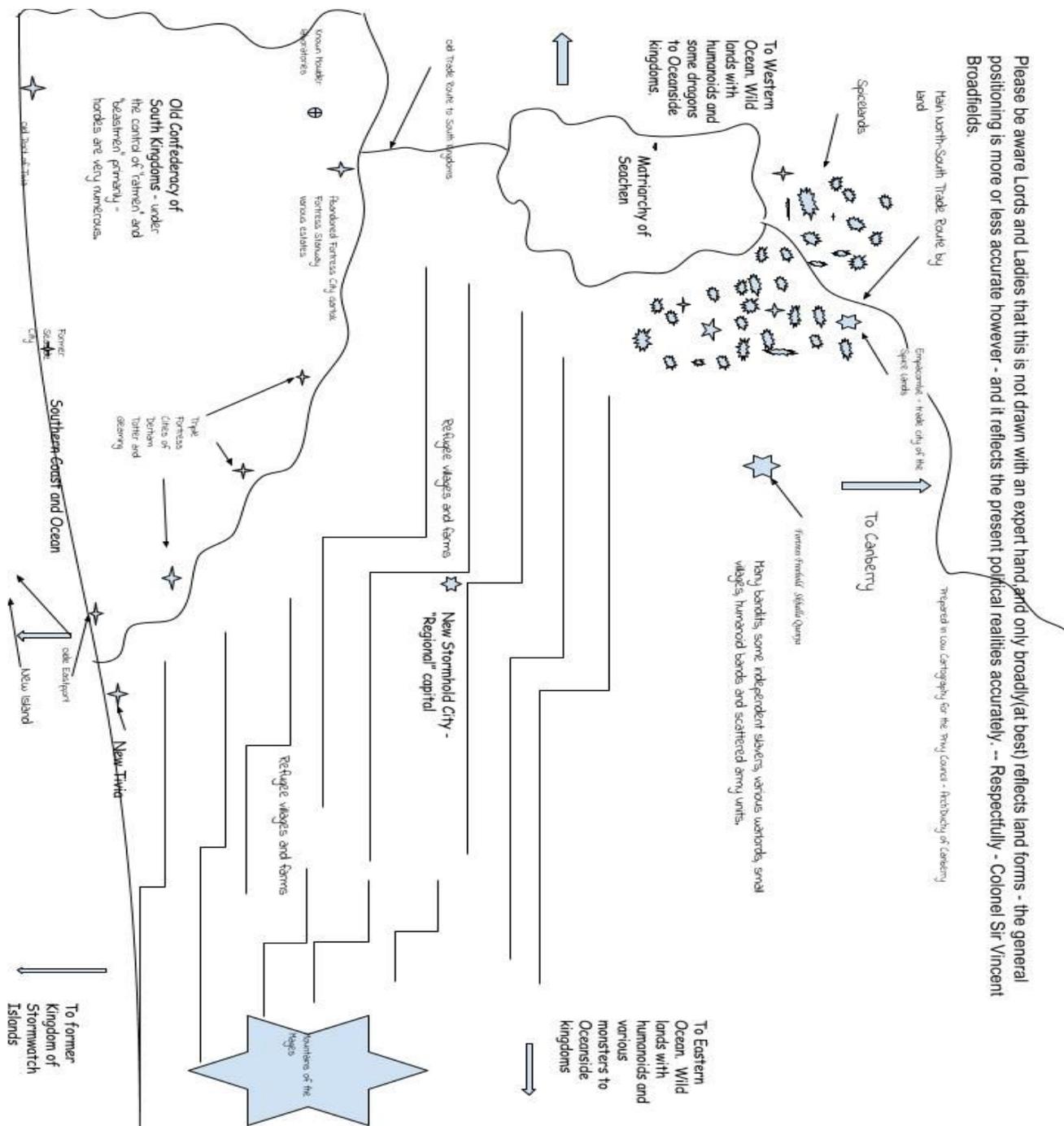
As it pleases you, the privy council and his Grace, this report contains information gleaned by intelligence officers among the legions that have served in the Southlands, intelligence assets that we had already place in the Army of the South Kingdoms who are now with the refugees, interviews with two of the surviving Spicelands Plars, and input from the chief intelligence gatherer with the unit of elite Drow presently assigned to guard her highness, the Arch-duchess/princess/empress. It is best considered a compilation of our best knowledge and estimates. The information in this report has been gathered over several months time.

The map was not drawn by low or high cartographers, but by intelligence operative, it is more concerned with geo-political realities rather than accurately depicting either landforms, or even exact locations. It is "close enough" on important structures and areas, but does not do justice to coastlines or "less important" structures and areas. Nevertheless, I believe that you will find it useful.

The report starts with said map and then follows with a somewhat detailed analysis of particular areas and powergroups within those areas.

I remain available at anytime to answer questions or further brief you, the Archduke or the Privy Council as a whole.

Respectfully submitted.



Special Notation: lands along the east of the old Confederacy of the South Kingdoms were not held strongly by the ratmen - who eventually fell back to the present border abandoning them. Among the things abandoned was most of one of the kingdoms - granted the most sparsely populated one prior and the one most impacted by the demon burst. That country had boasted a single port, which has now been considerably (and not very expertly) expanded and is now one of only three areas held by the refugees that might be called an urban center. We believe that the ratmen fell back from this area in part because it was close to The Mountains of the Mages and partially because other highly organized military forces were closer to them than they preferred there. It was also nearly incapable of being fortified. Some of their great creatures and some demons remained behind however and it is unquestionable that the area is raided regularly by "Warlord bands" - we do not think that anything more nefarious was in play, but we cannot absolutely prove that it was not at this time, so there could possibly be, we suppose, some secret plan in play - however, as it is impossible for any force short of an archangel to stop the refugees from settling there, and putting the old farmland back to use and expand the port (now the only one they have), it hardly matters - we will have to deal with it as it comes.

Major Power Groups:

Matriarchy of Seachan
Spice Lands
Mountains of the Mages
New Stormhold Region (Canberry)
Fortress Freehold Skhalla Quenya (of Moriquendi'rim)
Empacombe

Major Threats:

Ratman "empire" (former Confederacy of the South Kingdoms)
Stormwatch (now different Ratmen - may or may not be threat, much more peaceful, even trade)
New Island (no name, belongs to the unmentionable)
Bombast the Terrible and Horde

Lesser threats:

Humanoids and lesser monsters, some dragons, warbands, bandits, independent slavers, various warlords and scattered units of deserters that hold to military style discipline while committing atrocities.

Analysis:

Matriarchy of Seachan: The Matriarchy has withdrawn to its borders, closed the gates of the passes in and out, and is receiving no visitors. It has reduced its spice output (it is known to have enormous cash reserves, preserved over generations - so that will not harm it). Other merchants from the Matriarchy do come and go - but not in numbers and not as frequently. Non Seachan merchants, particularly males - can no longer even enter the borders, even to the trade city, unless they are personally known by and vouched for by a matriarch who "gives her let." We have every reason to believe that the military, which stood fast and refused to yield a foot, lost 3 out of every 5 of its soldiers (who given the matriarchal nature of the nation, are also the mothers of its next generation) with only 1 of each 3 likely to recover and return to service, while most of the rest are deceased. Seachan is still powerful and dangerous, but it has never historically been expansionist, and it seems to have become even more isolationist now. Between its magi and its remaining field armies, it could defend its borders vigorously against any imaginable attack that is likely to occur, but it is doing nothing to police even the near lands beyond those borders and we believe it can be counted out for the next 20 to 40 years as it recovers from the hellacious level of damage that came from the recent conflict.

Spice Lands: The Spice Lands, by the nature of their semi-autonomy were also very badly damaged, the various Plars and Satraps came together in strength to stop the invasion, and failed disastrously, while ironically succeeding in their secondary goal of stopping the enemy advance by slowing it long enough for its destruction. The northern alliance of Spice Lands took the brunt of the hammer fall and 18 of the 20 spice territories in it fell, not including that ruled over by the Sepat of the North who generalled the northern army. The invaders also destroyed the estates in the northern sections of the Spiceland that they conquered, except, as mentioned, for two very well fortified ones (one of those being the one belonging to the Sepat Knight Gardarius - who was a Rakshasa noble of considerable power (the aforementioned general, may he rest well - he is partially responsible for the failure of the offensive, he and all his men (cats?) died, to a last one.) His wife and cubs are presently in the care of Canberry itself. Many eastern and western Spice Plantations were also burned or partially razed, but the houses stand and many of the servants of those holdings live. The southernmost Spice lands are untouched, but cannot meet demand, thus driving up the price of spices everywhere, particularly given how much of the commodity goes to other continents. A small amount of spice being grown on Zest'qua but none on Khamista. The Spice lands supply the world with a number of spices and medicines (thus the wealth). Overseas exporting is more difficult for them now, because whether by volder or sea going ship, historically all of the transport for their best cargoes to other continents went through the Confederacy. (Note, destroyed spice holdings are not indicated on the map, but only those that still stand. There are some areas of still partially alive spice trees, particularly cinnamon, in the northern region of the historic holdings that are not noted, and have no effective caregivers, who might be able to bring them back to at least partial functionality)

Empacombe: This was the northern tradehub for the Spicelands, once surrounded by the northern plantations and holdings. It is a walled city, ruled over by a minor Caliph who is a follower of the Light. [Confidentially - and a fanatic] A strong contingent of knights and holy knights connected to the temple directed a robust defense of the city walls, which are broad,

high and strong and which were not breached. The caliph Benjamin bar ibndon owes allegiance to no one but himself, but cooperates routinely with the Spicelands capital city and its ruler [another... very devout... follower of the Light]. The bishop of Empacombe answers to the Archbishop in the capital and is a highly competent man in his own right.

Mountains of the Mages: This area is best avoided by all forces. The power at large in the mountains is unimaginable under normal circumstances. Originally the Mounts of the 35 Mages, several of the Magi were wiped out generations ago. It became the Mounts of the 30 Mages - and as most intelligence estimates place the number of surviving magical houses now at about 26 it is now simply called the Mountains of the Mages. The Magi are struggling over ancient artifacts left behind by either an Elder or an Eldron. Bits of ancient elven defensive works remain here and there, STILL FUNCTIONING. There are automatons in the mountains as well, including some that appear to be self-willed. There is a sizable population of villagers, farmers, huntsmen etc. who serve the various Magi. The Magi "houses" all seem named for original Arch-magi - some of them may still be the same Arch-Magi, now as lichens. Others are parts of lineages, and at least one or two are surviving offspring of apprentices, or apprentices of apprentices of apprentices. Large numbers of lesser golems populate much of the mountains, a few dragons lair here and there and some very well disciplined Orc and Uruk kind serve as shock troops. There are periodically also numbers of powerful and not so powerful devils summoned in when one of the houses takes a "dark" turn. It is our best estimate that any given house can field a power in troops equivalent to one to three elite legions. Most also have multiple mages of various powers - some elven artifacts, various magical and related creatures and sometimes humanoid troops that are also very disciplined. Most have villages, thorps, etc. of humans owing allegiance - and much of the land in the hills that is arable is farmed, although large stretches of broken terrain also endure. Were the various forces able to combine their strength, they would be a viable threat to any nation in the South - but that appears to be impossible. Even outsiders who enter and stay too long are lost to a "longing" that cannot be denied, a "longing for ... something." Presumably the mages know what the something is, but the desire to possess is said to overwhelm all other thoughts and desires - even for food, sleep and sex. Weaker creatures find themselves desiring to serve, aid, worship, stronger creatures, in the hopes of being rewarded with the glory of what they seek to find when those stronger forces find it. It is bizarre. We strongly recommend avoidance when possible - it takes weeks for the desires to manifest, but only hours for forces of SOME border force to find intruders, and unless they have something to offer toward "the quest" to eliminate them. All of the Magi and their servants are extremely territorial.

New Stormhold Region (Canberry holding): About two million civilians remain, perhaps a bit more - out of the once proud population of the South Kingdoms. Less than a half dozen legions also remain, shadows of their former selves, buttressed by some "lent" troops. The Region is powerful in people and a scant few villages and fortresses are being built - it is also fairly wealthy in that some things of value were brought with some refugees - however, it is nearly entirely powerless to defend itself. More was being "snipped" off the edges" shortly after the fall of the South Kingdoms and now it seems that the position of the Princess vis a vis the Archduke - may he live forever - seems to have caused some of the "snippers" to be less willing to snip.

Fortress Freehold Skhalla Quenya (of Moriquendi'rim): Once a center of slave taking, Skhalla Quenya was reformed into a heavily fortified trade hub. 8 regiments of elite drowan infantry from the cadet houses are here (about the equivalent of a full elite field army with auxiliaries in

the field for us.), together with approximately 100 skirmishers and 50 scouts, primarily human and half drow. The site is overseen by the Moriquendi'rim Lord Saharka the Enlightened, who took it over when the prior SlaveMaster of the 9th District was recalled to the Twin Cities of the Gates of Death. It is unclear why the particular title was given to Lord Saharka, but he is a known Paragon Level Coercer and a Blade Dancer of the greatest ability. He is also an artist and sculptor, whose works rival the greatest of human artists, who he is always willing to entertain lavishly and several of whom in both Enclaves and Canberry he sponsors, in exchange for exclusive first viewings of their new work for himself and his court (composed of his wife, a number of drowan house leaders, several human servants whose advice he values and the Beholder "Far Looking View Lover." (that last said to be a very peaceful sphere). The Glor'diadelian bishop of Enclaves was able to have the great coup of having the Lord bring his own original work for a charity showing in the spring, and raised enough money to support 10,000 orphans for 10 years from the showing, as no one had ever seen Nolder work before. This pleased the Lord greatly, so he matched the money raised from his personal fortune. It is our opinion that the Lord and his house are a stabilizing asset, not a danger, particularly as battle barges from the Moriquendi-rim and Aufaugauthala'rim holdings in Enclaves could reach him in hours if he were besieged by a force sufficient to threaten the peace in his area. The only potential danger here is that some human settlements, having no nobles in the area, are turning to the Lord and his court to render judgements for them in disputes. The Lord has made no attempt at a power grab based on this, and seems glad enough to do it - and has avoided a number of incidents that could have led to bloodshed, but still... we are not sure what to make of that.

Threats:

Stormwatch Ratmen: These could be a threat, but they seem to be settling in like any other race. Some of their members, perhaps many, but including some of the Whites and Piebalds among them (their people's ranks seem identified by color) have turned away from their fierce ratgod and toward civilized gods (some even to Glor'diadel) they seem more inclined to trade than fight, have moderated their reproduction rates (rather forcefully and crudely we admit) and are learning reasonable farming techniques. Still a threat, but long term prospects are unclear.

Ratman Empire: This is a very great threat. Not well organized, but dangerous. They do not produce well, are not willing to trade, and we believe use waves of outward invasion as a method of population control. Many fierce warriors. Many warrior clans. Some other clans including those who work with poisons and diseases and mutations. Some of the White and Piebald among them as well - much more malicious. Careful scouting suggests to us that if they united against a single threat they could field a force in the hundreds of thousands. Left alone and only defended against until an adequate force against them can be gathered however, most of them will be compelled to continue to kill each other instead.

Bombast the Terrible and Horde: What can I say? His taken name is appropriate. He is a bombast. His bands are a danger to the people of New Stormhold, and to other bandits and such. They would be chewed up and spit out against an equivalent force. They can field a total of about 2 field armies, but unsteady and green. Many of their members have left refugee families unfortunately and are poor and young.

Lesser threats: Any of these could raid, and some bands of independent slave takers might take

slaves (although Lord Saharka the Enlightened is true to the commitment of no more slaves in the district, and so his people will turn any band practicing slavery that they find to dust). The dragons are dangerous, but uninterested. Generally these are roving dangers - like serious storms or earthquakes, no more, no less.