

Letter to Alistair—tosseted and sealed with the personal seal of the Black Witch, Queen of the Inner Isles, delivered by hand to Dame Brionna by a Lyan of Paranswarm

Unto His Most Honored Grace, Alastair, Archduke of Canberry and Emperor of the Sardonyx Throne,

In the communion of the Ecumenical Council, from the Darkness to the Light

Receive from my hand this day, I prithee, in recognition of your elevation and in celebration of your coronation the gifts contained in the casket to be placed into your hand by my trusted messenger, Gomax, Lyan of Paranswarm, OED -- and guardian of the person of my daughter, Emma, Duchess of the Pass of Cathapha and Third of the Fleets of Black Sails. Receive also, as my special envoy, my daughter Emma, a puissant Witch of the colour Black and a modest Diabolist of the order of the Ebon Fortress, I ask.

My daughter does not come to replace my ambassador to your court, Lord Earl Bruce the Wide Of Mathas -- who has for some weeks now been present at our townhouse in your city, and has, I am sure, made known his papers to you, and delivered to you the other gifts that we sent with him. Rather she comes as a sign of my adherence to the dictum of the Ecumenical Council, and my acknowledgement of the greater threat -- which neither the Light nor the Darkness can easily throw down - and which even with all those who serve Law together allied with some of those whose service is unsteady opposing it - may do considerable damage over time before it is utterly ruined.

By the grace of the Black and by the grace of Lord Paranswarm, and by the grace of great Adramelec, Grand Minister of the 8th Circle and Chancellor-General of the Order of Swarms -- my patron among the hierarchy below -- I have been gifted with the sight, though not for myself -- and with it I see clearly that it is upon Drucien that the crushing weight must fall -- and it is upon Drucien that hope must fall as well, upon your house and upon you -- such an unsteady reed. Yet, the hope is not without merit and those set about you, though they be not of the most puissant skill or the greatest prowess, have a more important attribute -- in that they think. Victory have you already snatched from defeat, and the two great dangers that stand athwart you still shall you yet discover are one -- though perhaps even they know it not, for the power of those opposing you is too great to be pierced utterly, even by the eye with which I have been gifted.

My daughter will, if it is your will, remain at your court and serve your purposes for a few seasons, until this crisis be done. Afterward, do with her as you will. You must stand or fall, but you need not do so alone, and she is committed to sharing your fate, not for your sake -- but for the sake of her own people and others who can be harmed or helped by your actions. Make use of her as you will. She and her entourage can remain snug at our town house when you have no need of them, or they will stand in your court. All such decisions are yours. I do not doubt that you do not trust her, nor would I in your stead -- nor do I ask you too -- certainly not for my sake. I ask only that you send her not from your city until the matter be settled. In truth, once she has arrived I see not her fate, it is too far entwined with mine own - as are all those who serve me most loyally. She

may well die, by your hand or for your head. If so, so be it.

Enough. May the luck of all the gods be with you.

Unto the Darkness forever.

By my hand,

The Black Witch, Queen of the Kingdom of the Inner Isles