

From Cardinal Buibui Mtandao

Meta Menardi Aranea

Arran

November 1306

Ingenuus Meta,

My apologies for the delay in replying – your letter had to be forwarded from Avignon to Rome. His Holiness has instructed me to reply on his behalf, though he did ask me to inform you that the first Pope was known as the Great Networker.

May I begin by remarking on your own word skills, as your choice of ‘Arran’ for the name of your island home is so appropriate for someone we know simply as Aranea. One of my colleagues even suggested that Providence might have sent the man you mention to your cave, but I quickly reminded him that our beloved Thomas Aquinas did not wish grace to interfere with nature in such a way. Now, I am able to inform you that your unwelcome visitor is called Robert de Bruce, and that in this year of 1306 his brother Alexander is still Dean of Glasgow, and as it happens, one of the threads in our hands which we use to keep tabs on Scottish affairs (though we are aware he might be a double agent).

You say your desire to rid yourself of the presence of this Robert Bruce is based on a desire for freedom, and the example of the Maccabees. The Maccabees were extremists who were unaware of the advantages of a close link between church and state. But freedom is indeed a virtue. Keep focused on Plato: his views were strong but not extreme – how right he was that poets make a threat to good order (like that Dante Alighieri, you’ll know about his spider-woman) though of course you have bards part of your inner circle, nothing at all to do with what Dante said about Pope Boniface and circles of Hell. However, don’t try to tie Bruce up, as he may try to escape and would certainly do you more damage – rather, keep him fascinated by the beauty of your designs. In the meantime, we will alert the English King of his whereabouts, and help will come quickly.

I’m sure the language of your final paragraph was purely due to your understandable concern about Bruce’s behaviour. We value this new relationship with your species! It will be to our mutual advantage, and in return for our help against Bruce we would like you to join our European internet and give us an agent in every household – such a presence would be a new and powerful strand in the network, invaluable when a little spin is required. And you will be interested to hear that another of my colleagues has just lodged a prophecy in the Vatican, which we are keeping secret till the time is right; he says that one day there will be a world-wide web.

With cordial greetings,

Buibui Mtandao, Cardinal

aka Jock Sy