

The Townlord's Regrets

The truth of the matter is this:

People who dive down into the Chronomalis Crevasse disappear. Not because they die; at least, not *always* because they die. Some people are idiots, sure, and some are clumsy. Some get eaten, and some just aren't strong enough to survive in the dark, but some of them live through the trip.

They all disappear, because anybody who approaches the Monster and has the will to walk away is forever changed, and not necessarily for the better.

Those who sought the Miracle are gone. They've "disappeared". It's a joke the locals tell, and one they almost never explain to their visitors.

(After Dendar's Eclipse, we realised that nothing good would come of sending more victims-to-be into the Crevasse. We considered revoking the search reward and collapsing the only entrance.)

(If we had actually gone through with banning entry to the caves and not wavered like the cowards we were, what came next might have had a much happier ending.)

The Bard's Creativity

There was a girl.

(Be patient, kiddos! All stories need beginnings, and this one begins with a girl.)

There was a girl, an elf from the desert colonies: the ones who eschewed both halves of the Seldarine and revered the local goddess of sand, glass and *truth* above all else.

Some might say that they were a creepy desert cult who would eventually draw down a group of heroic adventurers to ruin them. And sure enough, a group of “righteous heroes” set out in true pitchforks-and-flame fashion to bring the shining City of Prisms crashing down, leaving its few surviving inhabitants to be scattered to the winds. There’s a thousand other stories to be told there, you know, ballads and dirges and requiems for the lost.

But the girl was nowhere near the desert when Zus’jaji fell: she was on an adventure of her own, and only heard of the disaster months after it came to pass. Years passed as the girl roamed in search of...well, she was certainly searching for something. Who knows what it was?

After all, the girl disappeared, and *that* is where this story begins: not with the travelling girl, but with her sister back at home, whose search began when the letters ran out.

(Okay, okay, hush for a second; of course you have questions! Everyone does! So do I! For example: “Why was the sister left behind?” is popular. Or maybe, “Where were their parents?”, though some critical thinking could give you a very depressing answer. My personal favourite is this: “How on earth did the sister, left to her own devices in a sleepy border town, learn to ride and fight and find things

lost in the name of the truth, all alone save for a pile of letters from a loved one long lost?”)

(But the thing about storytelling is that we may never know the true answer to the questions we hold - if you really can't bear the gaps, you must find your own conclusions. That's the beauty of multiple readings, isn't it?)

(This is no textbook, and I am not a schoolteacher. Now, shall I continue?)

The Historian's Facts

It was the elves that found it first, as is often the way of things. They ruled the darkness beneath the Ialenti Reach, after all, and the wastelands on the surface wouldn't be inhabited for another thousand years. By that time, the elves were gone. Now, all that is left are signs so dilapidated that none could read their meaning, only their intent.

(Maybe if those second visitors had divined their meaning, the history of that small corner of the world could have gone very differently. But alas, they did not, and this class is not meant for speculation. We are not here to discuss hypotheticals. We are here to learn what was done.)

Next came the serpentfolk, whose influence was such in the Reach that their name for it is the one that stuck. The exploration party found nothing of those who came before them and in their hubris they assumed that the land was untouched by intelligent hands. They were wrong, of course, but that is a fairly recent discovery.

The serpentfolk found the caves and explored them, but they could only go so far before the deaths began. So they stopped. The inhospitability of the northern wastes - Khronmlss, as the serpentfolk called it - was such that they didn't bother to establish more than a watchpost there, lest the dark began to leak out into the world.

(Which it did, on the day of Dendar's Eclipse, but that's much further on in the timeline. If there's one thing the yuan-ti know better than humans, it's when curiosity will lead to ruin. In their defence, however, "when" is a difficult thing to predict when it comes to the workings of monsters.)

Chronomlss would have likely been left alone after that were it not for the Grand Schism and the civil war that followed. It sent refugees scrambling for any scrap of safety they could find, and the serpentfolk guards were evidently voted the lesser of the two evils.

One group fled north until they were stopped by the watchpost barring entry to the wastes surrounding the caves. How the refugees secured passage has been lost to history, but it was enough to convince the guards to let the refugees settle in the wastes without reporting their presence to their superiors.

(There is no evidence that the deal involved prostitution, the yuan-ti additions to the gene pool may have come later and *perhaps* instead of giggling and rumourmongering, you should take a moment to reflect on the desperation of the refugees and ask yourself this: if you were in their situation, what would you be willing to do to survive?)

The refugees are widely agreed to have been made up of a human majority; though the exact demographics are hotly debated, there is also evidence for both dwarves and dragonborn being counted among their number. They carved a settlement out of barren earth through force of will and called it Chronomalis, a corruption of the original Abyssal moniker, and were too busy surviving to discover the caves until long after the war was over.

From here, the records are clearer thanks to the efforts of the elected townlord: in 146 RC, over one hundred and fifty years after the Grand Schism, the descendents of the original refugees found the caves the serpentfolk had hidden - having formally ceded control of the region with no mention of the darkness lurking beneath it - and decided to explore, as humans are wont to do.

(Hands *up* if you want to ask a question, you know that. But yes, you're right, RC time isn't standard for the continent. The denizens of the Ialenti Reach count their time in *renamak-czori*, "this year of peace" - would anyone like to hazard a guess as to why?)

The townlord, being a sensible woman, hired a group of adventurers - two clerics, a rogue and a monk, from the records - to plumb the depths of the caves over the course of a two-month contract. It took them a week to find the Crevasse, and another two for it to swallow half the team. Of the two who returned, only one remained on record: a priest of Mother Mellian, who gave up his adventuring lifestyle to settle in Chronomalis and establish an interfaith temple that remains open to this day.

The other survivor, the monk, disappeared into the wider world, though their presumed path can be traced by when and where rumours of the Crevasse spread as they became abundant in the years following that first disastrous exploration. They varied massively from telling to telling, as rumours tend to do, but the general consensus is that there was *something* at the bottom of the cave system near Chronomalis and the townlord was willing to pay anyone who found out what it was and brought back proof.

Adventurers being who they are, the promise of pay for finding something interesting in a dank underground maze was more than enough to bring visitors down on Chronomalis, doing such wonders for the formerly closed-loop economy of the area over the decades that followed that, in 224 RC, Townlord Raymond Karinsson offered a formal reward of ten thousand gold to whoever mapped the entirety of the Crevasse and correctly identified the entity at the bottom, causing a spike in adventuring-based revenue.

(For the record, this reward has never been claimed despite the time that has passed since then. You seem keen to tell us the major theories as to what the entity might be, don't you? Or do you just need to settle down and stop interrupting me?)

Meanwhile, the new source of income for Chronomalis allowed it to, if not prosper, then maintain a significantly higher standard of living than previously. The town itself has a steady population of about four thousand, with another two

or three thousand citizens scattered throughout the wastes in smaller villages that have sprung up along a road network centered on Chronomalis.

Due to its origin as a refugee settlement, Chronomalis observes a variety of Ialentionian annual festivals from an eclectic variety of cultures. It also boasts of a few unique to its history: the most well-known to outsiders, Remembrance Day, is held on the autumn equinox every year to honour those who disappeared in the Crevasse during the year. The festivities also grew to encompass the victims of Dendar's Eclipse in 947 RC, with Townlord Deirdre Bronzepick declaring that they should be memorialised as a reminder of the atrocities that occurred through lack of preparation.

(On that note, I think we'll stop there for today. Your homework for the week is to research the facts of Dendar's Eclipse in preparation for your next lesson: when was it, what happened and who was involved. Class dismissed!)

The Adventurer's Letter

(The following is a transcription of Artifact NA-2356837, donated by the recipient to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

Hi, Sis!

I hope you're doing well and keeping up with your studies! Did you read the thesis I sent you, the one about dwarven ancestral memory? What did you think? I thought it was fascinating, especially the major theories on the logistics of their cultural mass remembrances - the one about it all being down to mass hysteria was a bit uninspired, but I see where they were coming from. Do you think elves can do it too? That'd resolve so many theological disputes.

(The original includes a simplistic drawing of a pair of dwarven brains - denoted by incongruous beards - in the margins of the parchment, both sharing a thought bubble containing a tankard of a carbonated liquid. Next to the image are two elven brains - denoted by the incongruous pointy ears - in a similar position, except their thought bubble contains a flower.)

Unfortunately I ran out of spending money again (good note-paper is not cheap!) so I couldn't get a message-hawk to fly aaaaaaall the way back home from the Ialantiss Reach, which is where I am now. That's why I made Icarus do the trip instead! Don't worry, I put his feeding money in the saddlebags so you don't have to pay out of the slush fund for it. He's going to have to stay with you for a while, though, because as much as I love him he probably won't do well underground. Which is the other thing I need to mention!

I'm going to be staying put for a while while I investigate this new lead I found. Have you ever heard of Chronomalis? It's in the wastelands to the northern end of

the Reach, and the townlord - a human by the name of June Camalia - is offering a huge reward to whoever can map this massive caves system nearby! It seems right up my alley, honestly, especially since they also want me to identify this eldritch THING at the bottom of the rift in the cavern floor. I think I can do that.

(Enclosed with the original is a simplistic map of the Ialantiss Reach - dated to the tenth century RC - with a large circle drawn around the northern wastes and an arrow labelled "I'm here!" in the author's hand pointing to a town near the centre of the wastes.)

Anyway, the temple here is great! It's been set up for a few hundred years or so and explicitly designed to be multifaith in order to cater to the diverse population of the town AND all the adventurers who come through - there's even a little shrine to Our Mother! It legitimately made my day when the head cleric told me about it, I haven't been able to renew my vows in FOREVER. It was founded by a priest of Mellian, I think, given that she has the largest shrine; it makes sense that a matron would be super welcoming of other religions.

Ooh, but there's also an Emissary of Dekrathi here - it was a bit weird meeting her, since I didn't think that any of them were still alive! I thought you might not have heard of them, given the purges, so I included a copy of my notes on the history lesson the Emissary - she's a tiefling named Oración, isn't that pretty? - gave me when I asked because it was absolutely fascinating. Did you know that Dekrathi was actually one of a pair; that between them, they ruled the domains of dreams, nightmares and illusions? Because I didn't! I wonder what happened to the other one. Oración wouldn't even tell me their name, let alone anything interesting about them.

(Also enclosed with the original is a sketch of a white tattoo in the shape of a gravestone printed on a violet stomach: the gravestone is covered in names in many different languages. It is captioned "Oración's 'Emissary's Brand', as she called it. Each name is a spirit that she's put to rest - I wonder how long she's been stationed here." in the author's hand.)

I also talked to some of the locals and other adventurers to try and get a sense of the scope of the problem, and it turns out that nobody's won the prize yet because the Crevasse - what everybody calls the gorge in the caves - is HUGE and also really dark and creepy. Apparently there's also a legend going around that "people who delve into the Crevasse disappear", except that I've met a bunch of people who've been down there and came back? I'm going to have to quiz some more people, I think.

And also there's...okay, this is gonna sound a bit nuts: a few of the adventurers who are still hanging around town are talking about some kind of miracle at the bottom of the Crevasse. I cornered a few of them under Zone of Truth and they all said different things, but it sounds like whatever lives in the Crevasse can grant wishes, if you're strong enough to prove yourself to it. And I was thinking that maybe, well...

Maybe there is a way that we can see Mum and Dad again, after all.

(The next paragraph is rendered illegible by inkblots. This is noticeable, given that the rest of the letter appears to have been drafted from a rough copy and is completely free of stains or mistakes.)

It's worth a try, right?

Don't worry, though, I'm not going to do anything stupid. If it turns out that they were mistaken or the proving is too dangerous, then I'll just map the caves and come right back out. I promised that I'd be home for your birthday this year, didn't I? I need to make up for missing the winter festival, after all. You and Icarus look after each other until I get back, okay? Be good! I miss you!

Love, Sis.

(The original is signed with a flourishing loop and a diminutive, smiling face; it is dated to two months before the spring equinox of 964 RC, and is addressed to the post office in Baylur.)

The Sister's Calm

(The following is a transcription of Artifact NA-95010603, donated by the recipient to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

To Sis,

Miss Venarae is always telling us to be honest about our results, good and bad, so I put my report card in the envelope so you can see for sure that I'm doing okay. My literature teacher is super strict and doesn't like my class very much, so I think he might be being stricter than normal and that's why my score is lower than normal. I like him though, he's really good at making sure nobody disrupts the class.

Oh, but I showed my Dwarvish teacher the thesis you sent me (It was super cool! Thank you!) and they said that they "dunno how it works, it just does". But I think they were having a grumpy day, so I paid them in those sticky buns from the halfling bakery in the market and they explained what it felt like to actually share memories. It was very interesting and I took notes so you could know too: apparently dwarves need to drink in groups if they want to remember good things, since they only remember bad things alone. I think there's a metaphor in there somewhere.

(Enclosed with the original is a report card from the Baylur International School For Elven Youth, dated to the winter term of 963-964 RC - high marks in history and physical education, low marks in cultural studies and geography, average in everything else - and some near-illegible notes on dwarven alcoholic traditions.)

Ikky is doing very well here and the other stablehands were very surprised when I came in with one entire pegasus and asked if he could stay until you got home. I

think they like him, though. The stablemistress agreed that so long as I looked after him he could stay for free, which is great because Kerissa nearly had her fingers bit off after brushing his feathers the wrong way and I think everyone's also a bit scared of him now.

I also joined a gymnastics team! It turns out that all the practice in not falling off Ikky when he's a hundred feet in the air did wonders for my balance, so now I'm learning how to do all sorts of cool ninja jumps and how to climb tall things and it's all very fun and awesome. I even made a friend! His name's Nadir Tarenis and he's a human on the team; I think we're about the same age? He's very silly and I like him a lot.

(The original includes a simplistic image of two smiling figures holding hands in the margins of the parchment: one with distinctive elven ears and one with the beginnings of a mustache.)

That's nice to hear about the shrine to Our Mother; Miss Venarae is still trying to get the borderland council to agree to let her erect one in Baylur, but they don't want to because they think it'll bring the crusaders down here. That would be bad, so she's laying off a little, but she still teaches Nvaldan theology to anyone who wants to learn.

I actually do know what the Emissaries are! Lady Holinodel was in town to meet with Miss Venarae, and Kerissa said that one of her classmates said that she was trying to find information on one of them. I showed Miss Venarae your notes and she took me to meet with Lady Holinodel, who explained that they were trying to find an Emissary because they might be able to exorcise the ruins, and if THAT happens then we might all be able to go home and rebuild! So she took a copy of your notes with her when she left again, and told me to tell you that she wants to talk when you get back.

(The next paragraph is preceded by four scribbled-out sentence openers, each conveying the same message with varying levels of seriousness.)

And, uh, about the talk she wants to have...Lady Holinodel says that you're the highest-ranking member of our house now. So you're Lady Nastacia now. So you need to come home as soon as you can so your new duties can be discussed. I tried to tell her that you were busy and probably not interested in leading, but Miss Venarae said that whenever there's a succession crisis, whoever lays claim to the Founder's Boon is automatically next in line for leadership. And Alqamar went to you when Grammy died.

I don't know what I expected, really. Our house has always given themselves to the military due to the Boon of Prowess, so I know a lot of them would have died when Zus'jaji fell. And I know that if any of our aunts and uncles had survived, they would have come and found us by now. But I thought that at least some of them would have been able to get away. I didn't expect us to be the only ones left. But we are.

I can hear some of my classmates gossiping, sometimes. The last half-elf to rule a house was over four thousand years ago; it's nearly unprecedented. ~~I'm worried that-~~

(The last half of the paragraph is violently scored out; the original was slightly ripped due to the force used. The ink also runs in a way that suggests water damage of some kind.)

It doesn't matter, though. Aside from that, everything's been great! I won't do anything stupid either, so long as you stick to your word and come home for my birthday. There's going to be a gymnastics competition at the end of the year, so I'll have to practice a lot if I want to get picked to represent our team; it's being held in the imperial capital, so we'll get to go visit! Oh, and my school got permission to put on the Almu'avris Day show, so auditions are going to be starting for that soon - I might try out for it, I haven't decided yet. Anyway, good luck with your adventure! Stay safe! I miss you!

Love, Sis.

(The original is signed with a sharp scrawl and a diminutive, smiling face; it is dated to one month before the spring equinox of 964 RC, and is addressed to the Ophidian Inn in Chronomalis.)

The Sister's Fear

(The following is a transcription of Artifact NA-01574355, donated by the recipient to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

To Sis,

You didn't reply to my last letter. Is everything alright? I guess you might be busy mapping the caves, but still. This is important! I went to the library a little while ago to find a book on Ialentionian geography for my history class, and the head librarian said that they'd bought a copy of your treatise on moonblade artificing for the nonfiction section! You're in libraries now! It's so cool! You're the coolest big sister across any of the planes!

Oh, and Ikky's doing fine and hasn't bitten anyone recently, so the other stablehands have really warmed up to him. Kerissa knows this secret tappy language that Ikky's learning to replicate with his hooves, so we might be able to actually talk to him soon without magic! Pegasi are supposed to be just as smart as we are, so it'll be really interesting to find out what he has to say! I'll make sure to write down whatever he says so you can hear it too.

(In the margins of the original are four dot-dash patterns resembling that of a dwarven style of Thieves' Cant; they translate to random letter groups with no particular meaning.)

And speaking of secret things, I'm pretty sure that my gymnastics classes are a front for a thieves' guild's recruitment drive, because some of the best tumblers have been taken away for "special classes" and Nadir saw one of the instructors chatting to this really creepy-looking person and they aren't teaching us any

non-practical moves and it's all gotten really weird, okay, I think I might quit if things get any weirder.

I got picked for a "special class" too! I didn't do it because I figured you'd be mad if I did and then got kidnapped by evil thieves to join their evil ninja gang, but if I got picked that must mean I'm really good at gymnastics, so, yay? I made another friend in the team - her name's Laena Almasi and she's a not-Nvaldan elf, I think she'd be eighteen or nineteen if she aged like me and you - and her and Nadir haven't been picked for the "special classes" yet, but they're both really good so we think they might soon.

I told them about you, and Laena wants to meet you because there aren't very many paladins of Our Mother left; she wants to do a theology degree in the imperial capital, so she's been trying to learn about local religions in preparation. Did you take your textbooks with you when you left? I can't find them. Maybe they're still in the ruins.

(The original includes a simplistic image of two elven figures holding hands in the margins of the parchment: one has loose black hair and one has short auburn hair. Both are smiling widely.)

Speaking of textbooks, we've started a new unit in history class, and it's about the Ialantiss Reach! I'm taking lots and lots of notes in case they help you with your research; my teacher was very surprised when I suddenly knew ALL THE THINGS since I went through every book in the library with stuff about the Reach back when I got your last letter.

It was weirdly relevant to my current situation, I feel like I'm in a book or something. My textbook says that the yuan-ti were the original inhabitants of the wastes before they got booted out by some refugees of this big civil war that went down a thousand years ago, which is why the town has a weird name. Abyssal is such a weird language.

(Enclosed with the original were extensive notes on the history of the Ialantiss Reach, with a particular focus on Chronomalis and the events that have shaped the surrounding area's history.)

You better still be safe, okay? I'm performing on Almu'avris Day and I want you to be there to see it! I got the part of Essanis Melimion, which my gymnastics training will be helpful with, and even Ikky's got a job in the play! He was very excited about it. I know you said you might not be home until my birthday, but if you can come back earlier that would be great. But you'll be back in time for my birthday, right? Of course you will. You promised me you would, and you never break your promises. Stay safe! I miss you!

Love, Sis.

(The letter is signed with a sharp scrawl and a diminutive, smiling face; it is dated to two months before the summer solstice of 964 RC, and is addressed to the Ophidian Inn in Chronomalis.)

The Sister's Storm

(The following is a transcription of Artifact NA-734004, donated by the recipient to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

To Sis,

You didn't reply to that letter either. It's been half a year since I heard from you. Are you sure that everything's alright over there? My history teacher said that people say that "all those who delve into the Chronomalis Crevasse disappear". I don't think he realised you were there specifically, or he might not have said it. My classmates are talking about me now, when they think I can't hear them. It's not a good feeling.

Someone told Ikky about the legend, and now he's worried too. He gave me a message to put in the letter - I didn't translate it to give him his privacy, but he looked pretty upset when he was tapping it out. Ikky's gotten a lot better at the tappy-language (Kerissa said it was called Thieves' Cant and now I don't want to know how she knows it), but he's still practicing because it turns out that he's a total perfectionist. Like you!

(Enclosed with the original was a second letter (see: Artifact NA-9361505), written entirely in dwarven Thieves' Cant.)

Anyway, there's other stuff to talk about that's not me being paranoid because you're definitely fine. Almu'avris Day was great and the play went off with only minor hitches! Everybody LOVED Ikky, especially the kids, I made so much money off giving people rides for five copper pieces per lap of the grounds. Don't worry, Ikky was barely ten feet off the ground and I was spotting him the whole time,

nobody fell off except me that one time when I tried to show off to Leana and Nadir with loop-de-loops. I'm okay, though!

Speaking of them, though, our gymnastics lessons have been getting really weird and I'm now one-hundred-percent convinced that it's a recruiting scheme for some shady thieves' guild, because they had in a "guest speaker" who gave us all training weapons and had us play a game where we had to smack each other in vital spots without being noticed by the person we were smacking. It was all very assassin-y, but I won because of my many years of practice in sneaking out of bed to practice riding and also you already teaching me how to swing a sword properly.

Then the "guest speaker" (who, by the way, was totally that skeevy guy Nadir saw a few months ago) asked me all sorts of weird questions about my future prospects and my living situation and got mad when I refused to tell him anything and said I was "wasting my potential" by apprenticing in the stables and looking after our house. I have included a picture of his angry face; you don't recognise him, do you?

(The original includes a detailed image of a middle-aged male human in the margins of the parchment: he has gray hair in a buzzcut, thick eyebrows and a grumpy expression.)

Then my instructor said that if I wasn't going to take it seriously then maybe gymnastics wasn't for me, so I quit the team and am now hoping that Mister Angry Buzzcut doesn't kidnap me in my sleep. Nadir dropped out in the name of solidarity (and also because he skipped out on the sneaky thing and got the same talk from his instructor that I did) but Laena stayed on. She says that since she's leaving for the imperial capital in a few months anyway, she'll just quit when she moves away. I hope it doesn't backfire on her.

You don't think I'm wasting my potential, right? I know I'm old enough that I should be preparing for my rite of passage by now, but I really don't think I'm

ready for it. My bad dreams have gotten much worse recently, and a few weeks ago someone smashed a beaker in chemistry and I had a panic attack and threw up and had to be sent home early but the silent house freaked me out so I actually went and hid in Ikky's stable all day. And Lord Sianadon came by and asked to speak with you so he could "confirm our houses' continuing partnership" and I think he got mad when I told him you weren't available and it's been a very bad time recently, Sis, when are you coming home? ~~Because I'm~~

(At this point the handwriting, which has been getting distinctly choppier over the course of the last few paragraphs, becomes illegible. The bottom section of the original appears to have needed to be dried out after being soaked, and the next paragraph is very carefully written.)

My birthday's in a month. You promised that you'd be coming home for it, and I know that you're very busy but you PROMISED, and I'm holding you to it. If you don't reply or come home by the day of my birthday, then I'm taking Icarus and flying up to Chronomalis to find you. Got it? So COME HOME already, if you don't want me to miss school. Stay safe. I miss you.

Love, Sis.

(The letter is signed with a sharp scrawl and a diminutive, smiling face; it is dated to one month after the summer solstice of 964 RC, and is addressed to the Ophidian Inn in Chronomalis.)

The Pegasus' Insight

(The following is a transcription of Artifact NA-9361505, donated by the author to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

Mistress!

What is taking you so long! Your sister is freaking out, she thinks you might be dead or worse; she is trying to hide it, but she has the exact same "I am bottling up my emotions" face that you have and I am not fooled! It is starting to really worry me! Write back to us before she does something stupid!

(The original is signed with a large, muddy hoofprint that takes up a full quarter of the page; it is undated and has no address, though it was included in the same envelope as Artifact NA-734004 and as such it can be assumed that they were sent together.)

The Headmistress' Intervention

(The following is a transcription of Artifact VE-315003, donated by the recipient to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

Lady Nastacia,

I am Headmistress Quardi Venarae of the Baylur International School For Elven Youth, and I am writing to you to inform you of the detrimental situation that your ward has found herself in.

In recent months, Miss Nastacia's schoolwork has seen a sudden and sharp decline in tandem with that of her mental health, seeing a slight upturn around the Almu'avris Day celebrations almost immediately followed by a rapid relapse into panic attacks and traumatic breakdowns during class time.

As a survivor of the fall of Zus'jaji myself, I am fully aware of the difficult circumstances the two of you have been dealing with and recognise Miss Nastacia's outbursts as a symptom of that tragedy. However, your continued absence from her life has exacerbated her decline to the point that she has been too ill to attend school on several occasions.

I spoke with Miss Nastacia in order to determine your current address and gain permission to send this letter, and she mentioned that you have failed to respond to her letters for a full seven months. As her guardian, this is unacceptable behaviour. If you will forgive me for being frank, this has likely accelerated the collapse of her mental state, especially given her knowledge of your last known situation.

In previous years you have been highly involved with Miss Nastacia's education and have been responsive to official requests, so I would like to schedule a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss Miss Nastacia's tenure at my school and whether she would benefit from taking a few months away from school in order to better her mental health. I expect a prompt response, and may Our Mother guide you through these troubled times.

Yours sincerely,
Quardi Venarae.

(The original is signed in a brisk and neat hand; it is dated to just over a month after the summer solstice of 964 RC, and is addressed to the Ophidian Inn in Chronomalis.)

The Sister's Determination

(The following is a transcription of Artifact NA-57432674, donated by the recipient to the Wasanthi Centre For Nvaldan Historical Preservation. The original letter has been preserved in the archives due to its fragility.)

To Sis,

You didn't come home for my birthday, you didn't reply to my letter, and you didn't respond to Miss Venarae's request when school stuff used to be one of the only things that got you out of the house. You're not alright, and you probably haven't been for a long time. So.

I'm sixteen now, and under Nvaldan law that makes me old enough to sign myself out of school for a "recuperation break" in the absence of a parent or carer. I've asked Nadir to watch the house and make sure nobody breaks in while I'm gone, and Laena helped me plot a route to the Reach. Even if I'm hopeless with maps, Ikky isn't; he knows which way to go. Laena is leaving for the imperial capital in a few days, so we'll make the first part of the journey together before we go our separate ways,

I dug out Grammy's leather armour from the back of the storage room, as well as Dad's old rapier. Kerissa showed me how to maintain Ikky's barding and tie his saddlebags so they won't fall off in combat. I don't expect to be getting into any fights, but you always say that it's better to be overprepared instead of underprepared when going on an adventure. I'm willing to bet that it applies to rescue missions, too.

You're lost, Sis, and I'm going to find you. Consider this a declaration of intent. Stay put. I don't want to miss you.

Love, Sis.

(The letter is signed with a sharp scrawl and a diminutive, smiling face; it is dated to two weeks before the autumn equinox of 964 RC, and has no address written on the envelope. It appears to have never been sent.)