

**PID: 7451.1**

*To the Imperial Consul, Jarrick Orzel, of the Casinean Empire of the Bay of Catazar:*

*Please ask this Cardinal Hywel to write to me directly. I am happy to conduct discussions of theology. I appreciated the thought in directing my questions to a more willing correspondent. Please also accept my apologies for the slap-dash nature of my previous missive: in this one I have tried to present it more properly, as I am given to understand a diplomat, which I suppose is what I am, now, ought to do.*

*It is true that the Ancestor Spirit created the world, but in many other details I fear you err. Yet in your errors you are tantalisingly close to the truth as we understand it. The form. The form! Yes, it is all in that. Human and orc spirits are both immortal. But in the lifetime of the world, they only live once. I suggest you meditate upon this truth.*

*I turn to the delicate matter you raise. The individuals in question are prisoners of Tsark, having broken our laws by trespassing in our lands. Let me explain our law. For an outsider to come to the land of the People risks disrupting the climate of harmony and structure that we work hard to preserve. Of course, we are now in an uncommon era, where more outsiders know of us, and we begin to reveal some of the secrets we have kept for so long. In times gone past, those that came here were few, normally adventurous travellers from Zenith (with whom we share the peaks), but they did tend to come, at a steady and slow rate. Most were turned back.*

*Thus, our law of the Three Paths: outsiders who come without permission (and permission is granted in this time only to the diplomats of the mountain-people of Skoura with whom we enjoy a cordial friendship based in mutual respect) are imprisoned until such time as they choose one of three options:*

- *live out their natural life on the Isle of Zabor*
- *agree to have all memories of this place removed from them (which we achieve using a herbal preparation, magic being inefficient for such purposes)*
- *agree to join the People, having their very spirit reshaped in order that they might join our fellowship with the greatest harmony and the least risk of cacophony.*

**PID: 7451.1**

*Do not fear: those that choose the first of these are well-treated as honoured guests. We set no store by liberty, as I have been told many times you do, but we are not cruel. Some of those who reside on Zabor have been here for several decades - at least one arrived when I was myself a child, when at the time a man called Ahraz ruled in your Empire (she is particularly stubborn - her name is Ursula of the Hall of the Risen Sun, if this is helpful). Most are of your nation of Urizen as Ursula is - a few were captured when your spy network was dismantled, though most of those have left, having accepted our offer to facilitate this. If they want to leave, they need only choose to release their memories. If they consider their minds inviolate, then a life of isolation is the only option. Our laws on this matter are quite strict.*

*It is possible, given we are in a new era of communication between us, that exception could be made. But such a thing would require more trust to exist between us than it currently does. I think it wiser that I simply relay this information to you, and I imagine you may feel a raft of emotions about it. I understand if some of those emotions are anger. We have long lived wary of what your Imperial anger can achieve. My hope is that my candour will alleviate some of your concerns. We truly have nothing to hide, but our customs are our customs and our ways are our ways, and in any case you terrify us.*

*In understanding,*

*Sage Kristoph,*

*Appointed by the wisdom of the Council of Sages, and on the advice of the Adepts of Understanding,  
Chosen Representative of the People of Tsark to the Imperialists of Casinea.*

*To Skywise Gralka,*

*I omit your titles because I write in a personal capacity, as one thinking, feeling being to another. I will mirror your own greeting - hello. Hello suffices. I do not write many letters, though more and more these days.*

*It is difficult to express in words what your letter meant to me. You painted a very vivid picture with your words. Things matter. People matter. Yes. Yes, that is the simple truth of things. I had not realised, when you contacted us via the One Who Speaks Of Unity, that you acted against your Empire's decisions. "It had been decided" - by whom? By those, perhaps, who act without conscience. Those who drive your warlike empire to bloodshed, over and over. Those who act in discord, when we strive only for harmony. I think you are a good person, Gralka.*

*I do not know much about your people. Those who we keep here - those from your Empire who have violated our laws and trespassed here, and stayed a while - have told us much. In my lifetime, your Empire has changed - in my earliest memories I talked to a woman who in her youth fled angrily eastwards, and she spoke of a man called Ahraz who had become your Emperor, and in a moment of utmost grace, worked to find a common understanding between the enslaved and their slavers. And yet in my lifetime the granddaughter of a slave is made Archmage, and of the High Realm nonetheless. Perhaps the warmongers and sowers of discord do not wholly rule. It seems perhaps in recent times there has been a turn in the Casinean Empire's fortunes and in its nature, as a people. It intrigues me. It fills my heart with a trembling hope I can barely voice. Perhaps there is yet a chance you will join our voices.*

*It has been nearly a year since your action - I do not know when you wrote this letter, but I assume less than that. Yet you still fear reprisal? Worrying. Please, let me know if you truly find yourself in utmost peril. I can offer you little but sanctuary, but... there is always sanctuary here. In this one, beautiful valley, in this sacred place, there is sanctuary. Write to me, Gralka, if your kindness causes violent hands to rise up against you. We can always make to you the offer we make to any who find themselves here, drawn by the call of fate and by a memory they barely understand.*

**PID: 1693.1**

*Perhaps this happened last time. I have a sense of... I do not know. Perhaps... but the tipping point is not yet. Not yet. Too fast. Too soon, too soon it comes. We need to dance better this time, Skywise Gralka. Do you hear the spirits of those you knew dearly in life, or whose fate has cleaved to yours? Listen to them. Listen to their wisdom. They are waiting.*

*You asked about quiet places, and what I think of when I meditate there to clear my mind and empty my heart. In quiet places I think of those who came before me. Gifted as I am, as an orc, to be able to hear their voices, sometimes they guide me. My great-aunt was a vellut player in her youth, and as she aged she became a forewoman in our great quarry - a kind woman. I have a vivid memory of her arguing with Adept Milena, who in my youth was chief of the Adepts, about some finer point of philosophy, of the details and meaning of the recurrence. And then she turned to me and smiled. I hear her voice, in the quiet places. Her wisdom guides me, and, appointed as I am to the Council of the Sages of the People, so I guide them. Everything builds in itself, and everything matters. Everyone matters.*

*You have spoken to me about many things and I fear I will not be able to address them all. Write to me again, even if you are safe from reprisal from your warning. I say it again: I was so struck by the genuine kindness and warmth present in your letter. You have my free permission to write to me on theology and philosophy at any time. We like to begin a session of learning with questions to the other. So I lay some out to you.*

*Tell me - what do you believe? What do you think it is, this thing we call the world? How do you understand your place in it? What will happen when you die?*

*One day, I hope we meet. Speak to me then of the sky and of the snow and of the peaks.*

*In understanding,*

*Kristoph*

**PID: 8448.1**

Fintan,

I apologise for my late reply. It proved a little difficult to get together the mana to send it - a temporary supply issue. And then your most recent letter was addressed to the wrong citadel - luckily, through some serendipity of Autumn, I happened to be visiting the very place you sent it to! A piece of luck.

Firstly, let me offer my sincere condolences at the death of your friend Ravadi. In Axos we keenly understand the tragedy that dying represents, in the abstract, but grief is always an individual mystery. I will not pretend to understand how you feel - I am simply sorry you feel such pain. I trust that your friend's vigilant spirit protects her spirit from the worst of the Creator's tortures in the world beyond. When I arrive - of which more later - I would be honoured if you would tell me more about her, about her passing, and how you are marking her death.

Secondly, to business. You are the ambassador to Axos - it seems to me quite natural that you might entertain a visitor from Axos without it rousing any suspicion?

Therefore, I have decided to bring myself, and Bawn-Watch, to the Empire. I will be planning to attend with the shield quite openly - I imagine there may be others who want to talk to me about it! But the offer I have made is not something I will discuss with them - that is for you alone.

We do not need to conclude our business at the coming summit. I have been meaning to visit the Necropolis for a number of years now, and I have some scholarly contacts there I occasionally exchange letters with. I have written to them and they have helped secure me a reasonable rate at a place called Myfanwy's Rest, Fishguard, Necropolis.

**PID: 8448.1**

So for the time being, address letters to me there. It will do me a powerful good to take myself out of the Gates for a little while. I have just completed my annual devotional rites to my ancestors whose spirits remain here, protected by necromantia, and I have asked them for guidance and protection on my journey.

I will talk to you of Vigilance, Wisdom, and Understanding, and in person we may take the measure of one another. If you are willing, and are willing to open your heart and trust, I am willing to light within it the flame of Understanding. I will ensure I am suitably dedicated to this task. Bone Dust is hard to come by, but I will make the effort.

Perhaps I will even sample liao when visiting.

I have made some early inquiries with Grand Ilarch Adonai's office and requested that they liaise with Ilarch Maxatious's people to make sure he is aware of my visit, as given this nasty business in the western mountains, the Empire is rather a dark subject of conversation at the dinner tables and devotional meetings in high society at present. I will be just one of many travellers, of course! Ultimately simply a scholar with a fading career, though, I like to think, no little skill and wisdom. However, a number of people in Ipatavo know that I have the shield, and as my dynasty is old and well-regarded, and as I intend to make my journey publicly known, I don't wish to cause a *diplomatic incident* inadvertently. Forfend that I cause scandal!

I will see you soon. I hope we can begin a friendship. It cannot and will not replace the greater one you have lost - but we should make the best of the spiteful world the Creator weaves, and continue in the face of sorrow.

In vigilance, understanding, and wisdom, and in Ravadi's living memory,

Theodosia (of the Gates of Ipatavo!!)