

 You asked for a secret about the Empress. We will tell you the secrets of her family. We understand that some of these are secrets, and some rumours and whispers of secrets. You will need to tease the one from the other.

Isabotta, of the House of Seven Mirrors. Her mother Elise is dead - they say she died of an illness brought on by her age. She was a Merchant Prince, and she had enemies, and only three people in the Empire know that she was murdered. The trusted servant who slowly destroyed her health, the one who ordered her assassination, and the one who brewed the poison from the scarlet mushrooms of the Morass. If the Vgig were behind her death - and they had reason - then they had good reason to kill her slowly.

Her brother Kaspar Yakovitch, so brave and so foolish. Captured by the ores of the East, tormented beyond reason, he told them everything he knew. He made a good slave, until the Imperials came to Rebeschof and liberated his body. Does he still dream sometimes that he is back beneath the fingers of the Druj? Oh, he hates the Druj, hates them in his heart, and would see them all slain. Her brother Jonah Yakovitch of the Printer's Guild... poor black sheep Jonah. Youthful indiscretions with the Vgig, so easily done so hard to forgive. So precious. Was she behind his disgrace, vengeance for a brother who chose to support someone else for the Throne? That is surely just scandal and gossip. Poor Jonah, so maligned. Obfuscating truth with lies.

And then the father, dear sweet Gyorgy Yakovitch... oh we could tell you much. About the puppets he makes secluded away in his workshop. About the distance he feels from his children, so alien to him now. About the other things he makes there at his shadowed bench when he works so long into the night. We wonder if his children even know he is alive. Perhaps he isn't. No, Gyorgy Yakovitch is not for you. He is ours, and we will not speak of him. Sweet, clever Gyorgy.

Other business.

We are close. We require four more shrouds from you. One of the shrouds has gone astray, has found Necropolis, but this is acceptable to us. Before the end of the Solstice we desire four more shrouds. Peroz, kallavosa, Madruga, Therunin, Zenith. One *must* be Therunin or Zenith, the others are at your discretion. Complete this task for us how ever you may, but make sure it is done before the end of the Solstice. The shrouds must all be in place at the same time and at the moment the last one is completed we will know, surely know.

And we will be well pleased. And you will have truly won our favour.

