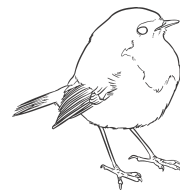


My Sibling In Virtue,

It feels so odd to be writing this. The Assembly of The way says that the question of virtuous orcs is one that will not be answered for a generation. I have never questioned the Synod before, yet I feel that our Courage has failed us. We find ourselves confronted with an unwelcome truth, and we shy away from it, say that it is for our children to solve, and in doing so absolve ourselves of responsibility. I am ashamed, and in my shame, I reach out to one who is not even human.

I once served in the armies of my people, fighting on the front lines against the neighbouring Orcish tribes in the name of human destiny. I remember very clearly what happened. It was a foul day, right at the height of the rainy season, and far too cold. We had been fighting to control a strategically important ford, and in the course of the fighting I was separated from my unit. Stumbling blindly through the forest, I chanced across one of your people, similarly lost. We saw each other for only a second before both of us drew our blades and commenced to fight for our lives. I will not bore you with the details, except to say that I was the stronger. I looked down upon my fallen foe as they breathed their last, but rather than strike the killing blow, something stayed my hand. I looked into their eyes, and as I did so, I recognised what I saw there. Fear, regret, pain. The same emotions that had just flooded my own mind. Though we did not speak the same language, I knew then that I had something in common with this Orc. My injuries were great and infection led to me being invalided home. I was given a parcel of land, and left with my thoughts.

I know that I saw in the eyes of that unfortunate soldier the capacity for virtue, every bit as strong as my own. They were a person, a person like every human I see every day with hopes and dreams and a soul that I might have condemned to an eternity of wandering in whatever afterlife you people experience. But I do not know, and that not knowing haunts me. So I beg of you, please tell me: what is the way to your people? What does virtue mean to an Orc? And what might await that dead soldier now that they are gone?



Alias of the Greenlake

To Who It May Concern,

I will be blunt: it is plain to me that your 'Way of Virtue' is crass and dogmatic, and that your Catazari Empire has allowed itself to become the unwitting accomplices of the hateful Creator. You foolishly march through the Black Gate with little but blind optimism that you can escape the horrors that await you.

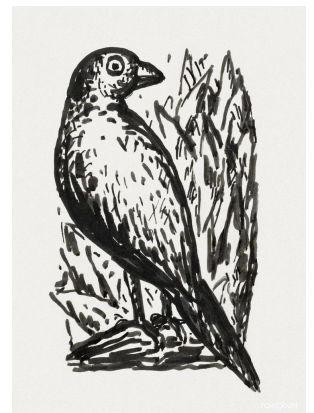
However, whilst your priests are plainly full to the brim with ignorance, I will confess a certain envy of your resources, station in society, and yes, I suppose you would call it ambition. Sadly, my fellow priests here in the Halls of Maykop are rather timid. I am not part of a favoured Ile, and as such do not have the access to the Great Ancestors here in the way I would wish. Because of this, my research took another path: investigating your so-called paragons.

I proposed a novel theory at a salon of the Order of the Ivory Cup that perhaps some Catazari 'paragons' had in fact managed to traverse the Labyrinth, using one or other unknown techniques, in the manner of the Sorcerer-Kings. Naturally, these methods have been hidden by Catazari superstition and dogma, but could be uncovered with some investigation. Furthermore, your priests hoard the pinnacle ingredient that could synthesise priesthood and necromantia: pure liao. Of course, my theory is rather more detailed than this, but upon presenting my initial thesis I was cast out of the Order!

It is to you then that I turn to for answers: I can only hope that you are less lumpheaded than the average Catazari priest! Are there any biographical similarities between the known paragons that could indicate the method they used to liberate? Has there been any attempt to contact the Paragon Spirits? Could pure liao be used to due this? Beyond the liao which can occasionally be purchased here at great expense and pure liao, which I understand is not subject to export, are there any other narcotic preparations that aid priests in your Empire? Perhaps we could correspond on this topic: it would be greatly useful to my ongoing research.

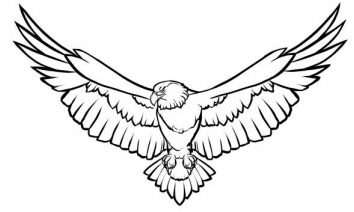
Yours,

*Kalliope Panagos,
Order of the Ivory Cup, Third Degree (suspended)*



To whoever is reading,

My name is Sigrid, and I hail from Skallahn in the land of Kalsea, whose jarls swear fealty to the Jarl-of-Jarls in the north, Yrsa Jansdóttir. I am a yegarra warrior, and fight among the Jotun. I am skilled at arms, and proud of my place. It is my duty to protect the thralls, in this, my final life, and in so doing I will give them the best chance to take up arms and make their final passage, if that is their choosing. Else they will be reborn into servitude once more under the protective cloak of the Jotun, as is the way of things.



I write this letter because in recent times a seed of doubt has been planted in my mind. Not doubt over my own position - I took up the blade many years ago and swore the oaths that all warriors, Jotun or Yegarra, swear, and resolve that this will be my final life and I will make the most of it come what may. But in meeting the winterfolk of the mark, and the yegarra who yearn to return to their rightful homes in the Dour Fens, I have learnt something about this way of virtue which means so much to our foes to the east. They tell me that the human spirit cycles endlessly through life and death, with the exception of those of exceptional nobility who transcend forever. They tell me that all kinds of people can express virtue, not just warriors, and that poets, soldiers, administrators and orators may all ascend as long as they truly embody the way.

I ask these questions because my daughter, a loyal and dutiful thrall to the last, has told me of her desire to make The Choice and join my side alongside the armies of Eisa winterborn. She is beloved to me, and so it pains me to say that she is weak of body and lacks the killer's instinct. I fear she is making a terrible decision to take the path of the Jotun in this life, and have implored her to reconsider and live out her days as a thrall, lest her soul be wasted forever. But she has heard of the exploits of those returning from the war and wants to take her place by my side.

Is it true what they say, that even once one makes the choice one can still return again, thrall or no? It seems fantastical to me. How could such a thing be possible; why would any soldier fear death when the end of one life simply meant the start of another? How can a society function when to kill or be killed is so meaningless? How can a warrior, honour bound to protect their charges at the risk of mortal peril, have a bureaucrat or artist elevated above them for reasons of some ill-defined virtue? In this moment of deepest doubt in my own place, I seek some solace in the words of foreigners that I have not been misled all these years.

Yours in honour,

Sigrid.

Dear Person Catazarre,

I am Guiffre and I am 8 years. I have one little brother and a pet dog named Gaston.

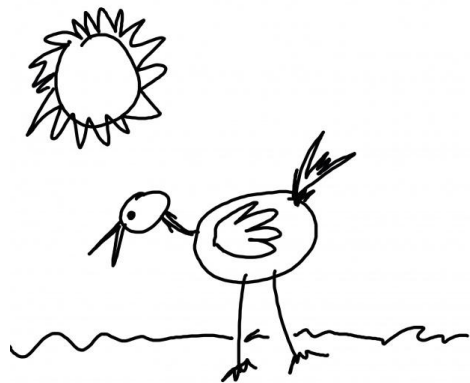
My mother says I learn Catazari so I listen to the priest who to talks to Grand-père. Grand-père is Grand-Prêtre de la Sanctuaire d'Argent in Memoria. They are friends. They laugh alot, and shout a lot.

I want to learn Catazari and la Vertu. Grand-père says to priest to not tell me la Vertu.

Sorry for my Asavaise I am learning Catazarre..

Yours faithfully,

Guiffre



To one who holds the Way of Vigilance in their heart,

My name is Capucine. I would that I could tell you more of my life and circumstances, but it is dangerous enough to hold the opinions that I find myself holding.



There is a great danger to our land, which your people have sometimes helped, and sometimes hindered. The Hand of Dumon are a great evil, cold and cruel. Because they are enemies of your rivals does not make them your friends. There is nothing in them but malice.

I am one of many charged with keeping their infiltration from the court of a Duke. In dealing with an Imperial who came to sell narcotics on our borders some years ago, I came to discuss the Way of Virtue, and in particular the way of vigilance. I came to regard its tenets highly. It has served me well.

I write to seek guidance not with my work, but with understanding the structure of the Way of Virtue. Why do you feel that this sensible practice needs to be reified as a spiritual principle? Why is it more virtuous for me to believe that vigilance is good for my soul than it is to use it in service of my lord?

The axe in my hand does not care why I swing it. It does not care how I found my way to the place where I swing it, nor how I chose the man who kneels at my feet.

The one who kneels does not care either. The fate of my soul is no concern of his. Aside from his own suffering, his thoughts go to the practical details: which one of his friends betrayed him; will they suffer too; how did we identify him and his cult? It does not matter what was in my heart, but what my eyes beheld, what my tongue told, what my hands did.

The Duke watching on has a care for my soul. He wishes me reforged in a position of high and dignified service, rewarded for the good deeds of this life. But why? Because I am good at what I do: because of the alert eye that drew my attention to a tattoo and a hand-sign, because of the suspicion that kept me up to follow a hooded figure to a back-street tavern. Would it be more vigilant if I said the prayers of the Highborn instead of the litanies of our Gods? Would it be better service to my Duke and my Gods?

I have seen what happens to those who speak of the Way of Virtue to my Duke. They do not do so twice. But I know your people are not fools, for all that you tolerate foolish rulership. I wish to understand the Way of Virtue, since I know already of the virtues themselves.

I understand that you have no particular desire to help a Suranni come to understand a point of philosophical principle. I tell you this truly; that I am seeking no inroads into your lands or minds. I am not hoping for strategic insights to the Empire's detriment.

I am

Capucine

Good day:

An Imperial preacher came to my town in the Delta and told us all about Wisdom. Only, she told us that Wisdom was about not talking too much and not listening to our elders?

I am struggling somewhat with this? Every elder I know talks a lot, and they're very wise indeed. They know how to predict floods and how high they're going to be. If you listen to them, you'll only get your feet wet, not everything else! They know how to build up the roads and ditches so we can keep getting about even when the floods come. They make the best bread and beer. They know loads of secrets from the tombs and old texts written by the Gods who used to live here, and stuff.

Your wise woman didn't seem very wise, is what I'm saying. Her hair was red, not white, and she kept saying how if you were wise, you had to say you didn't know anything, only you can't even really say that because you're not meant to talk, are you? I don't get it.

Anyway, my husband said to also say that she told us we didn't know everything. Well! He knows everything about his cows, and that's what he needs to know, so I don't know what she's complaining about. She was very rude.

I want to thank the Herald who's writing all this down in Imperial for me.

Thank you for your visit,

From,

Hendrika of Dorset

