TO: Matheson, Lucius; Governor's SecretaryFollowing the disappearance of Stalker 263, I

attach thepapers that were discovered. There is still no trace ofThorpe.Day OneI write what I

see. I see a cell. It has stone walls and a door.The door is locked. I see a plate and fork. The

plate isempty. I see this parchment, and a hand holding charcoal.I see these words. That is

all I see.I write what I know. I will endure to hunt and kill with thesword and gun, until I am

dust. I will obey the words ofmy Master, and the righteous ordinances of the Guild. Iwill

destroy the witches who seek to oppose them. Thisoath I swear on the lives I have wrongly

taken. I willendure. I will obey. I will destroy. That is all I know.I write what I feel. I feel

nothing.RRRDay TwoI write of what has just occurred.My Master brought me out of my cell. I

walked behindher up a flight of stairs to a yard. She struck me in the faceand bid me wait

alone in the yard. A gate opened in a tallwall, and I saw a street with carriages going by.The

rain fell, and my hood and cape became wet. A ravenflew over the yard. The rain

stopped.When the sun went down, the gate was closed. MyMaster appeared, and returned

me to my cell. She toldme I had done well. I sat down and wrote these words.When I finish I

will hide the paper and charcoal in the holebehind the third brick on the seventh

row.RRRDay ThreeMy broken sword is hanging outside my cell. My Mastertold me she can

find me through it. I must rememberthis, although I do not know what it means.I was taken to

my sword this morning. My sword is veryimportant. I know well that guns have their place,

but itis the sword that smites the witch. The Instructor broughtme from my cell and down a

different set of stairs. TheInstructor is smaller and older than my Master andrequires a stick

to walk as I do. He does not like me, andknows that I am murdering scum. He tells me so

that Iknow it well.My Master was waiting. The room where she waited waslong and low and

full of torches and swords. The swordswere broken. As my Master spoke, they shone

brighterthan the torches. My Master placed her sword next tomany of these broken swords,

until she found one thatwould be my sword. It had words written along its blade.The words

are different to the words I write here, but Iwas able to read them. In this writing, the words

say, “DieThou, Unsung.” My Master asked if I was reading them.I said I was. My Master

asked if I knew what they meant.I said I did not.I have seen words written like those before.

It hurts tothink of them.RRRDay FourI have received my second branding. Spells were

writtenon my back. It took most of the day. I felt pain.My Master told me that words have

power. They can bespoken, or they can be written, or they can be read.Sometimes, words

can be all three at the same time.Then they have a great power. That is why the words

areplaced on my skin. Placed there, they become words ofgreat power. They will give me

the strength I need tosmite the witch, and protect me from his magics.RRR

Day FiveI am not the only one.RRRDay SixYesterday I was late back to my cell from

training. TheInstructor trains me in sword and gun. He tells me I havenever held a gun

before. I do not know how he knows this.He is old and wise, so it must be true. He tells me I

haveheld a sword before. I must ask my Master when this was.I do not remember it. After

training ended, the Instructortold me I would join the other scum for training from nowon. I

did not know there were others like me. I did not wantto forget this, but I am not allowed to

write after themidnight gong has sounded, so could only write one line.Today there was

more training with gun and blade. Therewas also training with words. The Instructor spoke

and welistened. I learned of the Guild, and the Witchling Mastersand the Witchling Stalkers.

My Master is one of theWitchling Masters known as Handlers. Before she was aHandler she

was an Apprentice.I am a Witchling Stalker. I do not know what I was before Iwas a Stalker.I

know well that all Witchling Stalkers are witches who havetaken the lives of innocents with

their magics and beencaught by the Guild. For their crimes they are remade intoWitchling

Stalkers. Witchling Stalkers do not rememberanything from before. I know well that the past

is a slatethe Guild burns clean. I do not remember my crimes, butknow well they were

hateful and wrong. I must atone.I will stop writing now. I feel tired.RRRDay SevenMany

things happened today. I will write of them in theorder in which they occurred.But first I will

write about what has just happened. TheInstructor entered my cell and found these papers

andcharcoal. He was angry and struck me many times. Hewanted to know where I had got

them from. He did notbelieve me when I told him.Then my Master appeared. My Master and

the Instructorwent away to speak. I have been ordered to stay in mycell until I am needed,

but they left my cell door open. Iwent to the doorway and listened. I heard them talkingin

loud voices. I kept my feet in my cell, but leaned myhead out. In this way I was not

disobedient. I saw myMaster poking the Instructor in his chest with her finger.She spoke

quietly to him. I did not hear her words, butthey were few and hard. The Instructor's face

remindedme of the witch I will write of later, and he walked away.My Master read these

papers. She told me I had donewell.But I must write of the morning. This morning I was

takenback down the flight of stairs by my Master. Instead ofgoing to the hall with the swords

she took me anotherway. I went down three more flights of stairs, and passedthrough three

doors. My Master unlocked them and thenlocked them again when we had passed.My

Master brought me to a room where there wereothers like me. There were four of them.

They worehoods and capes like mine. They had guns and brokenswords. The swords had

writing on them, but my Masterhas told me not to read that kind of writing again. Theirskin

was black and burnt. Mine is, too. I had not noticeduntil that time. I must ask my Master how

we all came tobe burnt.I joined the four in a circle around two witches. I knowwell that

witches are a pestilence, and that theirsubversion arouses hatred against the learned men

andwomen of zeal who tirelessly serve the offices of theGuild in the name of the Governor.

One witch was a man.He did not look at us. He was young and dark-skinned,with chains on

his hands and feet. The other witch was awoman. She was also young, with golden eyes

and worechains. She looked at us. We looked back.My Master asked if I knew her name. I

said her name waswitch. The woman did not look at us again.My Master was joined by the

Instructor and by otherMasters, men and women. The Master's Master arrived.

She had short red hair, and was dressed all in black like araven. My Master has long, black

hair, tied back. She wearsfaded, brown leathers lined with fur, like a dirigible pilot,and she

has knives in her boots.The Masters spoke many words I will not write down. Theman was

sentenced to service, and taken to receive thefirst branding. Fear came into him, and he

struggled. Hewas taken through a large, yellow door made of stone thatwas locked and

barred with many bolts and seals. I believeI have seen that door before, but I do not

rememberwhen. It gave me a strange feeling in my skull when Ilooked at it, and an image of

a maze came into my mind.The red-haired Master of Masters went with him.The Instructor

told me the golden-eyed woman was notsuitable for branding. I killed her with my broken

sword.RRRDay EightToday I served the Guild for the first time. I will write ofthat.Me and the

four like me gathered in the yard. The nighthad been cold, and there was a white frost. We

receivedthe last branding, which is an iron collar. It is heated overa brazier of coals and then

clasped in place. The spellswritten on the inside are burned into the flesh. I ignoredthe pain,

as did the others like me. I have been burntbefore, I know. I will endure.Then I went with my

Master into the city, throughunderground tunnels. My Master carried a torch, and Irealized I

did not need light to see in the dark places. It wasthen I realized I do not have any light in my

cell, either, andthat I have written all these words in darkness. Are thereother things about

me I do not know? How can I ask, if Ido not know the questions?My Master talked of her

work. She hunts rogue spell-casters, witches and those known as the Arcanists.

MyInstructor says they are all the same, but my Master rolledher eyes when I told her this.

Her eyes are blue, like riverice. She wears hunter's kohl around them, to make themfierce. I

will help her in this work. This is how I will atone.My Master talked of hunting. Most hunts are

shortaffairs, and most prey are feckless and stupid. Such huntsare not sport, as only one

side knows they are in a game.Some hunts go on longer. Such hunts can last formonths, or

even years, and the target is as muchpredator as prey. Such a hunt brings out the tiger in

allwho take part, and there is peril on both sides. She saidthat those who have hunted

dangerous men andwomen long enough never care for anything elsethereafter. She also

said there is nothing so bittersweetas after the final chase, when the hunter standsvictorious.

I wanted to ask what these things meant, butmy Master signalled for silence.We ascended to

the city, where we walked the streets.Even in the busiest lanes, none came close to us.I

asked who we were hunting. My Master laughed,which I had never seen her do, and said we

hunted thepast. She did not explain how that was possible. She saidthat sometimes prey

would go to ground, and thehunter would need to wait them out, but that today wewould not

hunt anyone. Today was simply about gettingmy boiler running and making sure I did not

blow agasket. These are her exact words. I remember workingwith engines, and how boilers

should be tested beforethey are connected to a drive-shaft. I am pleased that Iunderstand

this.My Master took me to several different places, and atsome of these there were people

she spoke to, and atothers there were none. In certain empty places I feltthe words written

on my back squirm and readthemselves through me. This happened in a cellar, andagain at

the top of a tower on a bridge, amid thescattered ruins of some machine. I told my Master

ofthis, and she said it was normal. I was sensing theresidue of past magics or the taint of

long-gone witches.We went to a tall, thin house in a street of tall, thinhouses where a woman

lived alone. She was not a witch,and my Master spoke to her kindly, although the

womanseemed anxious. They talked for a while, she short andround and my Master tall and

thin like the house. Inoticed that although it did not seem like it, everythingshe said to the

woman was a question.When we left, I asked about the woman. My Master toldme that the

woman was decent. She made a living any

way she could, hand to mouth, sometimes crossing theline, but not enough to rouse the

Guild. It had all been toraise enough scrip to send her son back through theBreach, and

away from this life. But her son had been killedby a wolf my Master had once hunted, a wolf

who hadturned mankiller without warning.My Master said that the woman had not wanted to

seeme, not even to spit in my eye. She seemed disappointedat this.Later she returned me to

the cells beneath the GuildAcademy.I do not think my Master was talking about a real wolf.In

the old woman's house, I saw myself in a mirror for thefirst time. I was curious to see what I

look like. As myMaster and the woman talked, I removed my hood andface cloth. My head is

bare and burned all over, and theskin scarred and pale. I do not recognize my face. It

ispossible no one would. I have a deep wound on my head,which is well healed. It runs all

the way around my head,from back to front, in a circle. I do not remember how Iwas cut

there, or when.The woman with the golden eyes frightens me. She is inmy cell, and will not

go away.RRRDay NineDuring the night my Master came for me. I took Die

Thou,Unsungfrom its hook outside my cell and received myhandgun and ammunition from

the Instructor. When weassembled in the yard, I could smell smoke on the air. Itwas cold

and the stars were sore to look at.We went through the city to the river where a fire burned.A

building had fallen, its façade turned to rubble. A crateroutside suggested explosives. I

wanted to examine thecrater, but my Master led me into the ruined building. Ithad been a

teahouse, which in this part of town, myMaster said, means a whorehouse. Behind it, a

connectedwarehouse burned. The fire was too fierce to approach,although other Guild

agents were present and theirmechanical forms enabled them to enter the fire. I told

myMaster that witches were here. The writing on my backtold me so. My Master waved my

words away and spokewith two men, both of them also Masters. She returnedand told me

this was a waste of time, and our businesslay elsewhere. I asked what that business was.

She didnot answer. I asked who the witches were, and why wedid not hunt them. She told

me they were ThreeKingdoms, and that other Masters hunted their kind. Iasked if the Three

Kingdoms had different witches anddifferent magics. She shook her head, and told me I

askedtoo many questions.Everything I see is a question waiting to be asked. Aquestion

unasked is like a puzzle unsolved.We travelled on foot to Dockmast Four, and from thereby

tethered aircar out over the Quarantine Zone, alongthe newly-repaired Sourbreak line. We

did not go all theway to Sourbreak Station, and my Master called a halt atan unmanned

Dockmast deep inside the QuarantineZone. The Guild Guard who crewed the aircar's

gunsasked my Master how long we would be stopped there,and when we would be leaving.

She ordered them toawait our return. I saw fear come into them. They fetchedmore

ammunition for their guns, and strung heaviernetting around the portholes.We descended

the dockmast stairs. At the bottom myMaster opened a heavy, iron door and we passed

throughinto an unlit street. My Master locked the door. The keyssounded loud in the silence.

There were many deep clawmarks in the metal around the lock."No lights, not here," my

Master told me. "You must beeyes for both of us."She spoke quickly, her voice low, and

gave me directions.I followed them carefully, past buildings of many differentages and styles.

All lay in ruins. My Master made nosound as she walked, but I could not move as she did,

andthe scrape of my boots echoed. The writing spoke itswarnings. Small things stirred as we

passed, or largethings that stirred slowly. Die Thou, Unsungfelt eager inmy hand. At one

corner, the writings spoke of the ruinedpillars down a street to our left. My Master put a

handon my shoulder and we waited. We waited a long time,for what I do not know, and then

at her whispered wordhurried past the ruined pillars.

We reached the destination without further incident. MyMaster was breathing hard as she

opened a hiddendoorway in a timber and plaster wall. Steps led down. Sheclosed the door

behind us. Warning me to step whereshe did, my Master took every second step and then,

nearthe bottom, every third. We stopped before anotherdoor, and my Master told me to open

it. Having no key Ipushed at the door. My hand tingled briefly, and then Iheard a click and it

swung open.A suite of rooms lay beyond. The ceilings were low, thewalls tiled in brown brick

glaze and broad arches led fromroom to room. Yellow anbaric lights on the walls sparkedinto

life as my Master flicked a switch. The furnishingswere rich, but without prettiness or

femaleembellishment, as one would expect in a bachelor'sapartments. The rooms held no

clear purpose, and as wewalked through them I saw many tables spread withpapers and

contraptions of glass and silver whosefunctions were not obvious. I saw writing desks

stainedwith ink, and many boxes of nibs and rolls of spare paper.I saw one table entirely

covered with drawings of mazesand labyrinths, and another empty but for a small,wooden

puzzle box. Mixing jars and bottled compoundsfilled a nested set of boxes on a side table. I

saw machinesand devices, wired together in elaborate arrays not unlikethe cable network

we had made use of. A stand held aglass helmet studded with inwardly pointing rods

andwhat looked like chisels. I saw one device with heavyrollers that smelled of printer's ink.

In a back room, thecomponent parts of a Stirling engine lay disassembled inneat rows. Most

of all, I saw books and journals of allkinds, most arranged in bookshelves but many piled

ontables and on the rugs, some closed and some pinnedopen, some printed and some

handwritten. I sawintricate illustrations and rough etchings, brilliant colorplates and crude

hand printed pamphlets."This was the den of a rogue known as DamianRavencroft," my

Master told me, stopping to examine thetitles of a stack of journals piled on a tall stool. She

wavedone of the books at the rooms surrounding us. "What doyou make of him?"I

understood she meant me to deduce facts about theman from the way he lived. I told my

Master I saw manybooks."Which tells you what?"I replied that Mr. Ravencroft liked to

learn."He was a magpie. He hoarded. This was his nest.” Shewaved the book again. “What

else?"I spoke of the device with rollers. It printed words. Hewished to share what he learned

with others."He loved being the center of attention. He lovedspreading rumors and raising

awkward questions.Questions tempt lies. Lies tempt unrest. What else?"I thought of the

chess board, the drawings of labyrinthsand the puzzle box. I said that he liked games.My

Master nodded. "In that we agree. He liked games.He liked winning them most of all." She

swept somepapers off a high-backed armchair and sat down."Damian Ravencroft was an

oddity, even among thewitches we hunt. He did not live among others of hiskind, but they

sought him out, even here, among theperils of the Quarantine Zone. If I heard his name

fromone witch I caught I must have heard it from a hundred.Damian Ravencroft had told

them what an arcane devicewas for, and how it worked. Damian Ravencroft hadtranslated

some ancient runes for them. DamianRavencroft can get them passage through the

Breach.The good Doctor Ramos himself had occasional need toconsult with none other than

Damian Ravencroft.Damian Ravencroft had travelled everywhere, seeneverything and could

probably dance on the head of apin while he did it."She stood, with a snort, and began

turning out papersfrom a series of pigeon holes. "There are two sides toevery story, and one

must be careful who one trusts intimes like these. Some in the Guild said he was just arogue

like any other. Others thought there wassomething different about this one. Some said he

wasthe head of a great underground network workingagainst the Guild, a cunning,

dangerous man who poseda potent threat. A master criminal with connections in allthe

wrong places. Others thought he was cunning anddangerous, yes, but in a different way. He

was a seekerof knowledge. An inquiring mind. His greatest desire wasto see his knowledge

of magic and arcana spread as farand as wide as possible, shared out so that a pauper

could know as much as a king. A true democracy of thelearned. Some thought that was

even worse. Others," shepaused, "were not so sure.”She paced over to a marble-topped

chess table andmoved the pieces around on the board without purpose."Most so-called

Arcanists care nothing about otherpeople. They are in it for themselves. Their powers

flareup, they go on a spree and we knock them down." Shetoppled a row of pawns over one

by one as she spoke."Feckless and stupid. But Ravencroft seemed likesomething new,

something I hadn't seen before. A manwho imagined something bigger than himself." She

pickedthe king up and put it back beside the queen on the firstrow. "And so the name of

Damian Ravencroft continuedto be heard, but the man himself, despite years ofsearching by

the Guild, remained hidden.""And then it all changed. The wolf bared his fangs." MyMaster's

face became hard when she spoke these words."In the space of a month he killed three

people. Murderedthem. Witnesses saw it. He had never killed anyonebefore, but those three

lives put him on my list. I huntedhim. So did many others, but I knew him better. Orthought I

did. He ran, which told me all I needed to know.It was the most dangerous hunt of my life,

but finally I ranhim to ground. Here, in his lair. I don't know why I'm tellingyou this. It doesn't

mean anything to you." She shook herhead, and picked the queen up from the chess board.

Sheplaced a finger on the king, leaning it over. "He confessed,readily. He was unrepentant.

He wanted me to know whathe had done, the power he commanded. He left me withno

choice, and I gave him no mercy."She toppled the king over, and turned slowly, staring atthe

room. "And so we are left with questions, which leadonly to lies." She tossed the queen

away into a corner, andleft to examine the other rooms.I did not understand all of this, and

that irks me, but Irecount it here as best I can recall.I returned to the wooden puzzle box I

had seen earlier. Itsat alone on a table, on a white cloth. It was made of adark wood I cannot

name, and inlaid with a lighter woodin intricate curling patterns. As I look at it now, here in

mycell, I think those patterns form a labyrinth. I try and tracea route through it, but it shifts

and changes, and I lose myplace.I have tried to open the puzzle box many times, but

havefailed so far. I will continue. My Master has not saidanything about the puzzle box, and I

assume she does notmind that I took it. In any event, the golden-eyed womansaid I should.I

was going to finish writing there, but I remember oneother thing that happened before we

returned to the aircarnetwork. My Master was looking at a collection of oldbones set in a

glass case. There was writing carved on thebones, writing that gave me a strange feeling

when I lookedat it. I asked what the bones were. My Master replied thatthey looked like

memory charms, powerful ones, but couldserve no purpose she could tell. Some of the head

boneshad been carved with what looked like more labyrinths.She said she would return

here, until every one of DamianRavencroft's puzzles were solved, and then burneverything,

as he had been burned.I asked if the bones were the remains of Mr. Ravencroft'sthree

victims. My Master looked distant for a moment, lostin thought, and then told me that they

were not, and thatthe bones were much older and probably bought from asupplier of such

things, but that I had finally asked a goodquestion.My Master told me her name while we

rode back in theaircar. She is called Bellaventine Thorpe.RRRDay TenI know well that

Witchling Stalkers do not sleep, but lastnight I dreamt. I will write about the dream.I was

looking down on myself, at the scar that circles myhead, and it became a stone circle in the

floor of my cell. Ihave seen this circle before, and it had writing around it. Irecalled some of

what was written around the circle. In thedream, writing appeared, growing like snakes

across thefloor. I could not remember any more, and the writingremained incomplete.The

woman with golden eyes was in my cell. The bloodfrom where I killed her dripped onto the

floor. She told meI had to complete the writing around the circle.

I told her I was sorry I had killed her. She walked into thecircle and disappeared.I did not

awake, but I was aware the dream had ended.I spent the rest of the night trying to open the

puzzle box.I failed. The wooden patterns on the puzzle box aredefinitely a labyrinth, but try

as I might I cannot makeprogress and solve the maze. It changes and I lose myplace every

time.The Instructor came by shortly before the morning gong.I asked if he could assist with

the puzzle box. He lookedaround my cell, but did not look at the box, which I washolding up

to him. He spat through the hatch in the door,and told me there was something wrong with

me.I do not believe this is so. I feel well.I will endure.RRRDay ElevenToday was spent

training with gun and sword.My Master told me to write about whatever I want, so Iwill write

about her.My Master is like the puzzle box. I look at her and think Iunderstand, but every

time I look closer I get lost.She came to me during training and ordered me awayfrom the

others. She was unsteady on her feet, andslurring her words. She smelled of brandy. I was

glad togo, as the Instructor was being very hard on me.To begin with she was angry with

me, and shouted at me.She delivered many insults. Then she quietened andstopped talking

for a while. Finally, she told me she wasright about me. She told me the other Masters

werestarting to question her judgement, but that she knewshe was right. She repeated it

several times, and I did notreply. I did not know how to. Her final comment, beforereturning

me to the training, was that the only things shedid not understand were how, and why.I think

I am a puzzle box to my Master. I do not think sheenjoys puzzles as much as I do.I had the

dream-that-was-not-a-dream again. Iremembered more of the words around the circle on

thefloor. What will it mean when I remember them all?RRRDay TwelveToday I failed the

Guild and, more importantly, myMaster. I am ashamed, and know well that I must

alwaysobey my Master in all things.So why can I not? Is there something wrong with me?We

were running a rogue witch to ground, in an area ofthe New Construction near the Penitence

Viaduct. Hisname was Marco Bonatti. I later learned that he hadbeen visited by the Guild

seeking information about amurder at a guesthouse in Arble Street. Thinking he wasgoing to

be accused of the crime (he was not) Bonattikilled the Guard officers and fled. His use of

arcanewitchery in doing so was what set my Master on thehunt.We picked up his trail

without difficulty. The writing onmy back found him as a needle finds a lodestone, but hehad

been reckless in his use of his powers, and had leftmore than just magical traces. Anyone

who had got inhis way was dead. Each of them had been torn apart,either by claws or teeth.

I later learned that Bonatti'switchcraft enabled him to send forth the tribal drawingsand other

tattoos on his body in physical form.The trail led to the viaduct. It has not been used

sinceHollow Marsh Pumping Station was commissioned, andhas fallen into ruin in many

places. Much of the NewConstruction area has stone from the viaduct in itsfoundations.The

trail led like a glowing path through the ruins, but myMaster could not follow it as clearly as I

could, and shefell behind. Her sword and Die Thou, Unsungwere stillconnected, of course,

and she could follow meanywhere.I was able to surprise Marco Bonatti and get close to

him,but before I could strike he tried to use his witchcraft. Ifelt a surge of energy like a great

wave, and saw themacabre creatures inked on his arms writhe and coil.

Then there was a sound in my head like the tide going outa long way over a pebbled beach.

His power drained awayinto nothing, and the writing on my back read and wroteand spoke

itself all at once. He tried again, but the sea wasvast and empty and nothing he had could fill

it up. Hisenergies poured into the void. I stood before him on thedry beach and felt his

despair. I raised Die Thou, Unsung,speaking its name to the witch Bonatti so that he

wouldknow his fate.I could not strike.The woman with the golden eyes knelt before me,

notMarco Bonatti."Die Thou," I said. I was still frightened of her. "Unsung."She spoke. "No.

You alone will sing of me."Marco Bonatti writhed in anguish, pinned like a fly in amberas he

awaited my strike. I lowered my sword. The womanwas gone.My Master arrived and I helped

her restrain the witchBonatti so that he could be taken for questioning. MyMaster did not

speak to me of what had happened untilafter he had been placed in an iron Witch Cage to

nullifyhis poison, and the Guild Guard had taken him away.She asked if it had been my

intention to capture or kill him.I replied he had been a danger to others, and I hadintended to

kill him."But you did not.""No," I replied. I offered no explanation. I was concernedthat if I

mentioned the woman with the golden eyes, myMaster would agree with the Instructor that

there wassomething wrong with me. Why did I not strike the witchBonatti? I cannot say. I just

could not.My Master did not ask for an explanation. She just nodded,as if she agreed with

something I had not said. Then shetold me that we would pay a visit the next day to the

Guildmorgue.I asked what would happen to the witch Bonatti. MyMaster told me that he was

an ideal candidate for beingmade into a Witchling Stalker. I asked if this would be done."Not

in all cases, but we are short on numbers. TheSourbreak disaster didn't help, of course. We

lost quite afew there. I expect Mr. Bonatti will be joining you fortraining soon enough, once

we have put him to thequestion. He won't be Mr. Bonatti any more, of course.""How is it

done?" I asked.My Master sighed, with a half-smile. "You never could stopasking questions."

We walked a while before she spokeagain. "The magic involved is some of the oldest and

mostpotent the Guild possesses, and I do not know it myself.Sonnia Criid, the Master of the

Handlers, takes the witchalone into the Yellow Crypt. I have never been in there.Once

inside, Lady Criid uses that place to burn outwhatever magic is within the witch. How it is

done exactly,I do not know. All the witch's power is lost, along with theirmemories and

personalities, leaving behind a bottomlesspit inside the witch. The new Stalker now acts as a

lightningrod, attracting and exhausting all magic near it, and it iswhat makes you such an

effective tool against your formercomrades. While you last."RRRDay ThirteenI have seen my

Master look at me many ways. SometimesI see anger or disappointment, sometimes hatred.

Tonight,when she returned me to my cell after the visit to themorgue, there was something

new.She looked at me like a tiger.In the morning she had come for me as usual. She had

anunusual sense of energy about her, as if nothing couldhappen quickly enough.My Master

asked me to recall the short, round woman shehad taken me to see a few days ago. She

asked if thewoman had looked poor to me. I recalled that the housewas clean and the

woman had food and drink to offer myMaster. Her clothes were well-mended. I replied she

didnot look poor.We went to the Guild morgue, beneath the monolithicGuild headquarters.

There, she spoke to the head of themorgue briefly, a Dr. McMourning, and he passed us

toone of his assistants.

She led my Master and I into a long hallway lined withrough wooden cabinets. My Master

gave the assistant alist of three names, two male, one female. My Mastertapped her fingers

on a cabinet until the assistantreturned with three brown folders, secured with string.Each

bore an "Autopsy" stamp on the front, as well as awarning that the subject's remains were

magicallycontaminated.On the way to the morgue, my Master had explained thatthe bodies

and effects of those killed with magic wereoften retained by the Guild School of Surgeons, in

casethe Witch Hunters had need of them.My Master demanded to be taken to the remains.

Theassistant, a girl who seemed tired and bored, led us to asub-basement level, and

through a series of metal doors.The air grew colder with each door, until our breathfogged.

The assistant took a heavy coat from a hook andput it on. My Master had to unlock the last

door, whichhad the Witch Hunter's sigil upon it. Beyond, a series ofconnected halls held row

after row of locked caskets ofvarying sizes. Frost covered them, and crunchedunderfoot.The

assistant consulted books of records. This took awhile, due to the heavy gloves she wore. I

could see myMaster was having trouble remaining patient."There are no remains for any of

those three names," thegirl said when she had finished."Then what was collected at the

scene?" my Masterasked."Ashes. We discard those." The girl was sniffling with thecold."How

were the bodies identified?" my Masterdemanded. The assistant turned to her books, but

myMaster pushed her aside and did it herself. "Personaleffects", she said when she was

done. She swore. "Ishould have seen this sooner."She did not speak to me for the rest of the

day.…I am not supposed to be writing this now, as the midnightgong has sounded, but I

believe I should.I had the dream-that-was-not-a-dream again, and I havenearly remembered

all the writing on the circle. It isalmost complete.The woman with the golden eyes was here.

She told methat the only key to a labyrinth is a map of the labyrinthitself. She told me I

already have it.I asked the woman what her name was. She told me shedid not know. I

asked what it was like to be dead. Shesaid the woman she looked like was dead, but that

shewas not that woman, and that I should think of her as anaide memoire. I asked why she

looked like the deadwoman. She replied that that was up to me. I told her Iwas sorry,

anyway.RRRDay FourteenMuch has happened. I think much more is about tohappen. I am

about to open the box. If this does notwork, if it all goes wrong, then whomever is reading

this– whoever you are – you will read this, and mockwhatever is left of me, but I risk it all for

what I believein. Remember that.The morning gong sounded, but it was midday beforeBel

came. She was fully dressed in her faded aviatorleathers with the fur trim, and she was

armed. A tiger'sheart, wrapped in a woman's hide. She stood in my celldoor, staring at me

for some time. One half of her facewas chalked pure white. Over the top, she had drawn

askull's stark lines in black hunter's kohl. She lookedfearsome."Is there something you

require of me?" I asked."The game is drawing to a close. I think I know the how,just not the

why. So this is last time I will come for you,"she said."Am I going somewhere?""If you're

leaving, it won't be with me. But I will bewaiting for you.""Why would I leave?"

"Because you'll have done what you came for. Whateverit was. I hope it was worth it.""I did

not come here. I was caught."She smiled. It lent her eyes a terrible aspect. "Were

younow?"She left. I have not seen her since.I spent the rest of the day in my cell.I returned

to the puzzle box. I still could not understandwhat the golden-eyed woman had meant when

she said Ialready had the key to open it.Then the dreams returned. That is, I thought they

weredreams. They are memories.I saw a man with dark glasses standing on a platform

atMalifaux Station. He met with a young man and hismother, a short, round woman. He gave

them both money,and the young man got on a train. This happened twicemore, with another

man, and a woman. I hope they arewell.I saw a crypt with yellow walls. Inside a circle on the

floorknelt a man, bruised but defiant. I was that man, once.Outside the circle stood a woman

with hair like fire.Around the circle was the oldest of magics, the Guild'smost

jealously-guarded secret, written in the stone floor. Iheard a sound like the tide going out a

long way on apebbled beach, and realized I was the tide. Everything Iwas drained away into

a void. The oldest of magics burnedbrightly all around me, and I burned with them. The

firstbranding.I saw myself, only a few days ago, a golden-eyed womanlying dead before me.

She will not have died unsung. I willmake the Guild pay for her death at my hands.Back

further into memory. I saw myself, unburned. I wasin a room with dark furnishings, and

anbaric lightsglimmered on the walls. I placed my head in a glass deviceof my own invention

and it cut me, like a surgeon would,a single, clean cut all the way around. While aetheric

fieldsshielded me from pain, I directed the machine withthought and gesture. Chisels with

soulstone tips wrotewords in the living bones of my skull.Some words have power. They can

be spoken, or they canbe written, or they can be read. Sometimes, words can beall three at

the same time. Then they have a great power.That is why the words were carved on my

skull. Placedthere, they become words of great power. They gave methe protection I needed

from the stone circle to come.I saw myself in the same room, fashioning a puzzle boxfrom

thought alone. I knew what was inside that box now.I was.All my knowledge, all my memory,

all my power. Once Iopen the box, it will return to me.The chisels carved a witch-maze in my

head with theirsoulstone fingers.In my cell, I touched my burned scalp. Words beneath

theskin. In the bone. Words much more powerful thananything written on my back, or on the

collar around myneck.The fingers of my left hand followed the lines of the witch-maze etched

beneath the flesh, while the fingers of myright followed the lines of the labyrinth on the

puzzle box.I had my key, and it had been with me all along.The puzzle box unlocked.I dived

back into memory one last time.I saw a crypt with yellow walls. Inside a circle on the

floorknelt a man, bruised but defiant. I am that man. I lookedupon the oldest of magics

written on the stone around me,that which no man has ever seen and lived to remember.The

Guild's most powerful, most secret magics.I remember them all.Tigress Bel was right about

me. I have what I came for.It is time to go.