

My Dear Mithra,

How it tears at my heart to be so far away from you, my love. This world, our world, has gone mad, it seems, and that madness has driven us apart - but not for long. I have accompanied Master Dax and 10 of his closest friends north. You should see the world up here, it is all white and vast - a far cry from the Capital. Here, the air is filled with shouts; here, it is filled with silence. When the wind is just right, even at noon, I can feel the cold on my skin. It is a wonderful sensation, sharp and fresh and new. This will be an excellent place to wait out the war down south. As Master Dax says, "Let the Dawn cast deal with those thin-blooded troublemakers. We thinkers and artists should not have to dirty our hands." Instead, we will pass the time (short, I wager) in isolation with our thoughts, planning the fate of the world at its edges.

That is not to say we live in common residences. Master Dax has built a great stone mansion right into the mountain - a Mangs comparable to those that adorn the estates outside of Sperrin. It offers every amenity from a great library to baths to stone rooms filled with the finest food and drink - more than enough to stuff ourselves while the traitors are put down. Yet, the appearance of the place is less impressive than its function. It is, Master Dax says, a crowning achievement of the Mangs builder's art. Not because it offers up fountains of Essence, but because it offers up none.

I can see you scratching your perfect head now, love, but you read right. This place, which bears my own mark below that of Master Dax, is one of power, yet it does not draw others like us. To another chosen walking miles east away, it looks like nothing more than a small cave, yet, inside, we can live in luxury for as long as we wish! It is a Mangs the likes of which has never been seen before, one that takes the Essence it summons and channels it back onto itself, thus appearing invisible to the outside world. No turncoat brigades will find us here. We will be free of that conflict. A most cunning charade - and one your beloved was part of.

How they will be thrilled to hear this at the next builders' conference! Master Dax says I may receive my marble robe early for this! And while that thought comforts by mind, it does little for my heart, which aches for you. Visit soon, my love. I await you eagerly.

Until then, may the Sun and Moon favor you,

Ozandus

forza

Mithra,

It has been too long since we last spoke, far too long. The conflict in the South echoes even here, and we hear stories of Solaris who survived the ambush being executed. I do not want to believe the tales, but our friends no longer respond to correspondence. I do not fear the worst, but I think, perhaps, we might have underestimated the earth-blooded; they are weak but many. Crinis Proles says we should leave this hidden place and come to our brothers' aid, but all she does is talk, and most of us try to ignore her. We are thinkers. What good would we be in battle? Certainly, we are more valuable here. We will defend our temporary home and hope for the best. There is always hope. Always.

Words aside, my love, Master Dax has gone to the Sun's Court. We found him in the baths, the glint gone from his eyes. He was an ancient man, 15 times my own not insubstantial age, and he will be missed not only by us, his friends, but by the world. Who else will sculpt Eggines' flows of such grace and power? Bring his apprentices, I will be looked to, and I have learned his craft but not his genius. I fear I will fail. I have been practicing though, molding rock beneath the chisel. I fashioned a tomb for Master Dax. It is a low and ugly thing, but it will suffice until we can return him to the Capital and give him the funeral he deserves.

Our food stores, which we consumed with such gusto at first, are almost half gone now, and some of us have taken to eating congealed food one meal of the day. The taste is the same, but too much of it makes one weak. Aurs Orchestrator used to go hunting and bring back fresh game, but now, the lands around our home are almost stripped bare — not by us, dear, we are not that fat — but by the demon laborers Master Dax used and then bound to this place. We expected they would wither and die, but instead, Aurs says they are multiplying. I pray he is mistaken.

On a brighter note, our discussions and debates are truly things of beauty. With the Guardian watching the outside world and the servants catering to our needs, we are given time to exercise our minds. We talk about the world, the future and many new and wonderful theories about Eggines. These are truly gifted people — and brilliant. I feel that, when we do return, we will be toasted in the parlors and salons of the Capital as true thinkers. We may even shape policy after this war is over.

I await your response, my love.

Yours,

Ozandus

for



I die, my sweet. Time moves slowly here, but the seasons and years fade together. It seems ages since I smelled your perfume or held a lock of your hair to my cheek. So long, so long.

We hear nothing from the south, no news or rumors, all is quiet. We retreated to a silent place, and now, that silence is a curse. Crines left to get word, but she never returned. We do not know if the demon hordes that attack our walls nightly took her or if she is living in peace in the Capital. One or two have tried to follow, but they too have vanished. How did we fall so far?

Our debates have turned to arguments and infighting. We have nothing to fuel us except our own hate now. Love, passion - these things are alien to us. We fight each other, with words and fists. It is a sad cycle - one that I have participated in, to my shame.

We do not starve, and we do not freeze, but we are cold and hungry. Our food is gone, and all attempts to grow more have failed. We have burnt every flammable thing for heat. Our skins have faded from gold to bronze to ash. The silents cannot kill us, but they pick and peck at our will. My will. Aurs Orchestr, driven mad by this place, put out his own spark. Others have considered doing the same. I have.

I wrestled this parchment away (yes yes, your willow - I have become crust in isolation) so that I might write to you, though I know not where you are. I only pray that you hear my cries and send some response.

We were wrong to come here. We thought to live like gods while the world warred, and yet, we find ourselves prisoners of our own desires and fears. We cannot leave, and we cannot stay. So, slowly, we fade away.

Yours,

Uzandus

for you